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VOL 22

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CRITICISM

a quarterly for literature and the arts
volume XXII, number 1 · winter 1980

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JUDITH FERSTER *

Intention and Interpretation in the "Book of the Duchess"

According to Barthes, the "cult of the author," the obsession with the person who has produced and who supposedly controls the meaning of a text, is over.[1] If so, the death of the author is a logical outcome of the nature of writing, which allows the message to be received when the author is not present. The absence of the author was especially problematic in the fourteenth century, when reading literature for oneself was becoming more common and people were less dependent than before on hearing poetry read aloud.[2] In performing their own works, poets have some control over audience's experiences. Since, in medieval Christianity, salvation was often connected to the right use of language, an author who gave up his limited control over the interpretation of his work was spiritually endangering his audience, and perhaps himself. Harry Bailly's self-interested interpretations of some of the *Canterbury Tales* reveal Chaucer's interest in the problems of oral performance. The *Book of the Duchess* explores the even greater openness of the text to the anarchy of readers' intentions when the writer is absent.

The primary mode of discourse in the *Book of the Duchess* is not storytelling, as in the *Canterbury Tales*, but conversation; the poem takes conversation as its model for the relationship between an author and his reading audience. The metaphor is appropriate because interlocutors in the poem are often alienated from one another. Every example of conversation emphasizes the difficulties of communication by casting doubts on the ability of the one who is addressed to respond correctly, or even to respond at all. The poem contains speech addressed to a woman who, in dying of a broken heart, seems to have wilfully misinterpreted a truthful message, a god who may not exist, a knight who may be a projection of the speaker's imagination, and Death, who does not answer. The woman, Alcyone, is a character

* Judith Ferster is an Assistant Professor of English at Brandeis University.

[1] Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142-48.

[2] Donald Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), pp. 64-67.

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in a tale in a book, a fixed form not responsive to its audience, and the mourned White, the topic of conversation between the narrator and the Black Knight, is one of the many medieval examples of women who are important because they are absent. In each case, communication seems to be stymied.

There are several plausible interpretations of how the problem is resolved. The poem can be seen as either a description of the insolvable problem of the isolation of the self, or an account of successful communication between the narrator and the Black Knight. Through the ambiguity of the poem, the ease with which it seems to shift back and forth between these two readings, Chaucer explores a phenomenology of communication based on the very condition that makes communication problematic: its dependence on fiction. Thus, taking conversation as its paradigm, the poem links relationships between authors and distant audiences to relationships between interlocutors who are face to face. The *Book of the Duchess* is a manual for twentieth century readers on how to read a fourteenth century poem, and on how to read each other.

I

Conversation imperilled by self-enclosure is a metaphor for the danger besetting the relationship between the poem and a distant audience. What is more, the poem raises the possibility that the audience is *always* removed from the poem and that, indeed, speech is always removed, not only from the listener, but from the speaker. Not merely communication, but also identity is threatened.

The dream vision is well-suited to the explication of solipsism as the main obstacle to the correct reading of the world. Medieval dream theory accounts for two basic kinds of dreams, truthful and untruthful. They are carefully distinguished by their sources; truthful dreams are visitations by an external agent such as a god or an important relative capable of predicting the future, untruthful ones are caused by internal imbalance, for instance, from eating too much, or worrying about one's job.[3] The trouble with this system of identification, as readers of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* know, is that it allows for classification of a dream only after what it predicts has or has not happened. Since there are no criteria which permit us to categorize a dream according to

[3] Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Macrobius' Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William H. Stahl (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1952).

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form or content, the dream vision is inherently ambiguous: it may reflect external reality or merely an internal condition.

The beginning of the *Book of the Duchess* does nothing to reassure us about the nature of the dream, or about the likelihood of the narrator's recounting it successfully. In fact, at the opening of the poem the narrator's inability to sleep has distorted his relationship to the world:

> I have so many an ydel thoght,
> Purely for defaute of slep,
> That, by my trouthe, I take no kep
> Of nothing, how hyt cometh or gooth,
> Ne me nys nothyng leef nor looth.
> Al is ylyche good to me—
> Joye or sorowe, wherso hyt be—
> For I have felynge in nothyng,
> But, as yt were, a mased thyng,
> Alway in poynt to falle a-doun.
>
> (ll. 4-13)[4]

Since he tells us that he takes heed of nothing, we can assume that the "ydel" thoughts to which he refers in line 4 are not just idle or random, but empty thoughts, with no meaning at all. The phrase, almost an oxymoron, suggests that his disease disturbs his perception and locks him inside his own mind.

The danger of self-enclosure is also reflected in the names for the mental phenomena that "fill" his empty mind:

> For sorwful ymagynacioun
> Ys alway hooly in my mynde.
>
> (ll. 14-15)
>
> Suche fantasies ben in myn hede,
> So I not what is best to doo.
>
> (ll. 28-29)

Although "fantasy" was one of the Middle English words commonly used to translate *species*, the image that mediates normal perception, the term has a negative connotation as well.[5] One of the examples of the word cited by the *Middle English Dictionary* calls the Trojan horse a "fantasy." The language does not distinguish between an image that

[4] Quotations are from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

[5] Sheila Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 61.

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mediates knowledge and a device that deceives. Although "imagination," too, has positive uses, it was also used as a medical term for the illusions produced by cataracts, which form a physical barrier between mind and world. What the narrator claims to see may actually be a product of his diseased mind. If he is indeed cut off from the world, isolation is not his only problem. According to Aquinas, the intellect is active only as the mind perceives the world through the senses.[6] Because we know ourselves by reflecting on our minds as they perceive, to have an empty mind is to cease to exist as a self.

The narrator's account then is paradoxical: he presents us with both an insolvable problem and a solution. Language may either cure isolation from the world or intensify it. Language is a cure in that to speak to another, to make a request or to express a need, are actions with which he breaks out of the self-enclosed state that threatens his identity. He defines himself as subject with the first word of the poem, "I." Writing implies that he is not (or is no longer) in the state he complains of. He is capable of treating himself as an object of self-reflection:

> I have gret wonder...
> How that I lyve.... (ll. 1-2)
>
> So when I saw I might not slepe....(l. 44)

He can also present himself as an object of attention to others:

> But men myght axe me why soo... (l. 30)

Once he has begun to speak the poem, he is not suffering from the disease of apathy. Had he still been apathetic, he would not have been able to request a book, read it, sympathize with the main character, or start his poem. This discrepancy between the content of his complaint and the implication of his ability to complain may signal that he is already at least partially cured of his malady. This discrepancy, however may magnify the problem of loss or absence because it shows

[6] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries* (New York: Blackfriars in conjunction with McGraw-Hill, 1964), 1a. 87, 1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty gives a modern formulation of the same idea in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 361: "Solipsism would be strictly true only of someone who managed to be tacitly aware of his existence without being or doing anything, which is impossible, since existing is being in and of the world."

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that he is absent from himself. The self he refers to when he claims to be apathetic is already past. The poem itself alienates him from "authentic" experience. As he reminds us at the very end of the poem, what we experience as we read is not his dream, but his poem, which is now predicated upon the existence of a lost original.[7]

The narrator's relationship to the story of Alcyone is ambiguous in a similar way. If his project, or the project of the poem, is to cure the knight's malaise, the story of Alcyone both does and does not contribute to the cure. It does because the book is "other," but it does not because he absorbs Alcyone into his own mental state. On the one hand, his empathy with the bereaved queen is a response to another. But on the other hand, the empathy merely gives him a new reason to remain unhappy. Empathy with another may be part of the cure, but if the other merely represents the self, and if misery merely loves company, empathy is just projecting one's own emotion onto the world.

Ovid's story demonstrates the dangers of assimilating others' words or actions into one's own mental set. The mourning queen, who is fasting for grief over her husband's disappearance, is visited by an apparition of her husband (Morpheus disguised in the king's body), which tells her that he is dead and that she should stop grieving. His exact words are "let be your sorwful lyf" (l. 202). He then instructs her to bury his body, and leaves. With that, Alcyone falls into a coma and dies in three days.

Her response to the apparition is an example of wilful misinterpretation. Her previous promise to Juno—send me certain knowledge of my husband's fate and I will dedicate myself to you—implies that she originally meant to live after hearing the news. The king's message—bury my body—implies that "let be your sorweful lyf" means "give up your sorrow and get on with your life." Alcyone's response is simultaneously self-interested and self-destructive—suicide by misin-

[7] As J. Hillis Miller notes, it is the supposed "copy" which is the source of the originality of the "original," "Ariadne's Thread," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1976), 66-67. This is particularly true in the case of dreams, where a later recounting provides the only access to the original artifact.

The separation of the individual from himself is an idea that has received attention from both medieval and modern writers: St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), X. 8, 32; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 385 (a comment on Aquinas). In "Limited, Inc. abc...," *Glyph*, 2 (1977), 162-254, Jacques Derrida explores the way one is alienated from self by language (pp. 185, 193, etc.).

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terpretation. In one way, she is the mirror image of the narrator—she sleeps too much, he too little. But in another way they may be just alike in assimilating the mesages of others to their own purposes. She misreads Mercury, he misreads Ovid. One interpretation of the story is that one should not grieve too much. But rather than ending his eight-year mourning, the narrator extends it at least one day on Alcyone's account (ll. 99-100). Her story advances him farther on his self-destructive course, rather than recalling him from it. For this reason critics have speculated on whether the narrator "learns" anything from his dream, because we can interpret his announcement of his extra day of sadness as positive or negative according to whether we think it is healthy to sympathize with another or unhealthy to use another's pain as an excuse for prolonging our own.

Our interpretation of the fact that the book leads him to sleep will depend on our assumptions about sleep and the dream. For Alcyone, sleep, which is metaphorically death ("the dede slep," l. 127; "dedly slepynge soun," l. 162; "This cave was also as derk/As helle-pit," ll. 170-171), leads to literal death. Is the narrator's sleep healing or a form of death? Is the dream an encounter with another person in which the narrator is resocialized, or merely his reproduction of his own situation?

Insofar as the poem is an elegy for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, the Black Knight is clearly someone other than the narrator, that is, John of Gaunt, Chaucer's patron. The interview with him marks the narrator's return to a healthy relationship with the outside world. But if the knight is John of Gaunt, how could Chaucer be wrong about his patron's age (John of Gaunt was 29, not 24, when Blanche died), and what sort of rules of decorum would allow the artist to portray his patron as an embarrassingly self-indulgent mourner who needed to be coaxed back to rationality?

The alternative is that the knight is a projection of the narrator.[8] When we meet him, he is in a state very much like the narrator's at the start of the poem: he is apathetic and out of touch with the world. He cannot see the narrator or hear his greeting. He is also concerned with death, but goes the narrator one better in not merely fearing it, but openly wishing for it:

[8] This view is supported by Gadamer's comment on understanding as dialogue: "Because our understanding does not embrace what it knows in one single comprehensive glance, it must always produce out of itself what it thinks, and present to itself as if in an inner dialogue with itself. In this sense all thought is a speaking to oneself" (p. 382).

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> Allas, deth, what ayleth the,
> That thou noldest have taken me,
> Whan thou toke my lady swete.... (ll. 481-483)

We can explain several features of the interaction between the two if we see the knight as a representation of the narrator's own death-wish. The narrator admits early that his behavior is "agaynes kynde" (l. 16). His "drede... for to dye" (l. 24) may not be simply fear of death, but fear of self-inflicted death. He reveals his attitude toward suicide in his talk with the knight:

> Thogh ye had lost the ferses twelve,
> And ye for sorwe mordred yourselve,
> Ye sholde be dampned in this cas....(ll. 723-725)

Critics have often wondered at the narrator's seeming inability to grasp the nature of the knight's loss; his questions (e. g., ll. 1139-1142) make him appear ignorant of what he should have learned when he first heard the knight singing his mourning lyric. The reason for this obtuseness becomes clear if the Black Knight is an expression of the narrator's ambivalence about his own death-wish. The frustrating critical question, "Does the narrator learn anything from the dream?" could then become the psychoanalytic question, "What wish is the dream expressing?" [9]

On the one hand, the narrator may really wish for death. On the other, he may also feel guilty for his wish. Seeming to misunderstand the Black Knight's loss as trivial gives him an excuse for berating the knight for sinfully wishing to die. He lectures him at length on the evil of suicide (ll. 714-741). This is a neat psychological mechanism for assuaging guilt by externalizing it. The narrator is saying, "He's the sinful one, not I. I'm the one who corrects him."

The dream sequence produces one more twist of self-justification in the narrator's climactic expression of sympathy with the knight's grief (a process I will examine in more detail later). When the knight earns the narrator's "hyt ys routhe," the narrator fulfills his wish to have his own intense feelings accepted.

The Black Knight is thus the perfect occasion for the narrator to express his ambivalence towards his own impulse. He may be able to

[9] A. C. Spearing discusses the relationship between the narrator's dream and other aspects of Freud's theory of dreams in *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 58, 62.

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produce the knight's thoughts because of the great powers of empathy he acquires as the knight's friend, or he may have these powers because he is the knight. The dream may be a confrontation with the external world, and it may also be the involutions of a self which simultaneously turns inward and splinters into mutually contradictory fragments.

The *Book of the Duchess* oscillates between two opposing views: the existence and integrity of the self and the other, and the dissolution of the self, the other, and the text. Two perfectly plausible reactions to the poem are that either a powerful encounter has taken place between the narrator and his book and between the two figures of his dream, or we have been part of a self-replicating series of characters who are shadows of each other—the narrator, Alcyone, the narrator's dreamed self, the Black Knight, Chaucer. There seems to be no easy way to decide whether the poem means to champion the existence of self and other, and affirm that they are knowable, or to proclaim that such selves are an illusion. By seeing this dilemma as part of the subject matter of the poem, I will suggest a resolution which demonstrates communication even where communication seems most problematic.

II

As I have mentioned, the narrator has shown himself capable of being self-reflective (ll. 1-2, l. 44), and of projecting his desires onto others. He has begun to acknowledge himself as object for others (l. 30) but has not considered others as subjects of their own experience. Both are necessary for communication and both are a function of imagination.

Since the narrator's present tense defines the time of writing, not the time of the experience itself, the other for whom he must become object is not so much the " one " who reaches him a book at the start of the poem nor the Black Knight, as us, his readers. Self-awareness, then, will be awareness of himself not as reader or dreamer, but as writer. His acknowledgments of the literary discourse taking place are therefore signs of his increasing self-possession and part of our education about how to respond to people and works of art.

Self-conscious references to discourse function in both ways in the narrator's response to Alcyone as he reads Ovid. At the moment when he tells us of his empathetic identification with the grieving queen, he also indicates that both his knowledge of her suffering and our knowledge of his empathy are mediated by the written word:

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Such sorowe this lady to her tok
That trewly I, which made this book,
Had such pittee and such rowthe
To rede hir sorwe, that, by my trowthe,
I ferde the worse al the morwe
Aftir, to thenken on hir sorwe. (ll. 95-100)

All the stages of reading—reading, responding, remembering, and then writing one's own version—are contained in this one sentence, which nevertheless stays true to the human suffering which evokes it. It actually describes not only feelings, but the communication of feelings through language.

The narrator's next response to his book takes up the problem of relating to others, especially when one is unsure of the ontological status of his interlocutor, a problem which is important for understanding the etiquette of discourse in this poem. The narrator, who at the start could "take no kep/Of nothing," (ll. 6-7), explains how crucial it was to have "red and take kep/Of this tale" (l. 224). The key to his survival is that he learns from his book about a god of sleep, a figure he never imagined because he is a Christian. He is delighted at the possibility, but even so, precisely because he is a Christian, he is dubious about whether such a god actually exists: "Me thoughte wonder yf hit were so" (l. 233). His delight is qualified by the subjunctive. The question that Chaucer is posing here is one that is relevant to all discourse: what do you do if you are not sure that the being to which you are addressing yourself really exists? The question pertains not only to new gods about whom we are skeptical, but to the beginning of all new dialogues. Exchanges between people often begin on an "as if" basis. I begin to speak to a stranger as if I am sure he knows English and is not really a robot. My first attempt at conversation gives him the benefit of the doubt.

Since the narrator's response to Morpheus is also a response to Ovid, the "as if" of discourse with the god also applies to discourse with a book. "As if" is an appropriate response to language that is fixed on a page, and to an author who is dead. It suggests that we treat the book as if it could respond, to see what we get back. Although the narrator is reluctant to play, "game" is the only alternative to belief, which is impossible, and insomnia, which may prove fatal. Before he began reading, he thought of reading as play and play as amusement, a way of killing time, like chess or backgammon (ll. 49-

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51). Now play becomes experiment. Reading a story inspires him to exercise his own imagination. From the book he gets an emotional experience and Morpheus, and from Morpheus he gets sleep, a dream and a poem, all of which replace the suspended animation, the living death he suffered before he tried to reach out toward something outside himself.

The importance of his willingness to play in both personal and literary encounters is reinforced when we meet the Black Knight. According to his own story, what he has been deprived of when Fortune takes his queen is his ability to play:

> And whan I sawgh my fers awaye,
> Allas! I kouthe no lenger playe.... (ll. 655-656)

In his account of the game with Fortune, he also defines play as evil deceit and assigns it to Fortune:

> She ys pley of enchauntement,
> That semeth oon and ys not soo. (ll. 648-649)
>
> Ful craftier to pley she was
> Than Athalus, that made the game
> First of the ches.... (ll. 662-664)

When the narrator stumbles upon him in the dream, he is in the alienated state that comes from the refusal to play the game, the refusal to affirm the reality of the outside world. He has reason of course—he feels cheated. But he is trying to achieve the impossible state of being a self without being in the world.

But to ignore the world is to deny one's nature, since people are partly defined by interaction with the world, and the knight bears many signs of his place in society such as his emotion and his accoutrements of knighthood.[10] Of course, while he is ignoring the world, the knight is also speaking: as he stands with lowered head he is making "the dedly sorwful soun" of poems recited to no audience. Speaking courtly love lyrics is one more sign that he belongs in the world, and is either denying his nature or indirectly asking to be heard. He experiences himself neither as object of his own reflections nor as object of another's attention. That this apathy should follow his wife's death

[10] In l. 512 Pan is referred to as "god of kynde." If there is a pun on "kynde" (nature, kindness), then his anger may indicate the unnaturalness of the isolating subjectivity in which the knight is trapped.

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is natural; one of the things we lose at the death of those we know is the sense of being seen by them. His only attention to someone outside himself is in the apostrophe to death in his lyric. Unlike the narrator, who addresses Morpheus and gets dreams, the knight addresses nonexistence; but nothingness is not listening. The knight is, after all, alive. He does not renounce language, but in addressing only Death, he renounces discourse, language addressed to an audience capable of responding. The knight must learn what the narrator learns when, instead of taking heed of nothing, he takes heed of a tale: how to direct his attention to an attentive world.

The knight is close to death because he is a poem without an audience, an embodiment within the poem of the poem before it has found its audience and is "withoute noote, withoute song" (l. 472). When the narrator prods the knight into accepting him as an audience, he provides a model for us in our relationship to the poem. We are to rescue it from the limbo of not being read, becoming the audience it asks for by its very existence.[11] By reading we are the attentive world that saves the poem from speaking to no one.

For the knight and the narrator, as well as for readers, becoming an adequate audience means playing the game of "as if." The initial dialogue between the knight and the narrator is a version of the game of discourse. Since the knight knows that the narrator could be anrgy at being ignored, and the narrator knows that the knight could be angry at being disturbed, they acknowledge and eliminate these possibilities with the series of apologies in which each indicates that he has the other's point of view in mind:

> He sayde, "I prey the, be not wroth.
> I herde the not, to seyn the soth,
> Ne I sawgh the not, syr, trewely."
> "A, goode sir, no fors," quod y,
> "I am ryght sory yif I have ought
> Destroubled yow out of your thought.
> Foryive me, yif I have mystake."
> "Yis, th'amendes is lyght to make,"
> Quod he, "for ther lyeth noon theto;
> There ys nothyng myssayd nor do." (ll. 519-528)

After the knight assures the narrator that there is nothing to forgive (a

[11] Maurice Merleau-Ponty makes a similar comment about *all* that one sees: "The scene invites me to become its adequate viewer," in *Sings*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), p. 94.

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move even more gracious than forgiveness), the narrator seems convinced that the two of them can communicate because the knight seems, despite his grief, "skylful and resonable" (l. 534). Since both of these words mean "rational" or "right" or "reasonable," the narrator seems to be affirming that the two have the same values, or (as "skylful" implies) know the same rules. The Black Knight has lived up to his knightly appearance, and proves "tretable" (l. 533)—willing to be "treated" by another, open to discourse. However, the way is still not entirely smooth. A good deal of the following discussion is taken up with finding suitable subject matter. After the knight rejects the narrator's opening small talk about the hunt with an abrupt "Y do no fors therof... /My thought ys theron never a del" (ll. 542-543), the narrator's reply seems to be an attempt to reassert his understanding of the Black Knight's perspective:

> "By oure Lord," quod I, "y trow yow wel;
> Ryght so me thinketh by youre chere.
> But, sir, oo thyng wol ye here?
> My thynketh in gret sorowe I yow see. (ll. 544-547)

He offers his "oo thyng" only after asking permission, and then turns from impersonal chitchat about the hunt, to a direct observation about the knight's state of mind. His offer to help the knight is full of subjunctives and humble qualifications:

> Me thynketh in gret sorowe I yow see.
> But certes, sire, yif that yee
> Wolde ought discure me youre woo,
> I wolde, as wys God helpe me soo,
> Amende hyt, yif I kan or may.
> Ye mowe preve hyt be assay... (ll. 547-552)

The narrator, having been rebuffed once, seems somewhat apprehensive after this offer to be an audience for the knight's story:

> With that he loked on me asyde,
> As who sayth, "Nay, that wol not be." (ll.558-559)

His interpretation of the knight's look reveals his fear of another curt refusal. His expectations are wrong; the knight responds in the narrator's elaborately courteous style:

> "Graunt mercy, goode frend," quod he,
> "I thanke thee that thow woldest soo,
> But hyt may never the rather be doo." (ll. 560-562)

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Though he denies that he can be helped, he fulfills the narrator's request by launching into a complaint that both expresses and explains his sorrow (starting at l. 560). At various points thereafter, the conversation is punctuated by the knight's requests for and the narrator's assurances of trust:

> "By oure Lord . . . y trow yow wel." (l. 544)
>
> "Trowest thou?" (l. 651)
>
> "I telle the upon a condicioun
> That thou shalt hooly, with al thy wyt,
> Doo thyn entent to herkene hit."
> "Yis, syr." "Swere thy trouthe therto."
> "Gladly." "Do thanne hoble hereto!"
> "I shal ryght blythely, so God me save,
> Hooly, with al the wit I have,
> Here yow, as wel as I kan." (ll. 750-757)
>
> "By oure Lord . . . y trowe yow wel! . . ."
> "Nay, leve hyt wel!" "Sire, so do I. . . ." (ll. 1042ff)
>
> "For Goddes love, telle me al."
> "Before God," quod he, "and I shal." (ll. 1143-1144)

The trust between the two is based partly on sympathy: narcissistic selves want their perspectives confirmed by others' agreement. They may want their friends to be rubber stamps validating their own prejudices. However, the narrator is not merely sympathetic. His response to the knight's story is complex. First, he is sympathetic, but we are told so in an ambiguous way. He says

> And whan I herde hym tel thys tale
> Thus pitously, as I yow telle,
> Unnethe myght y lenger dwelle,
> Hyt dyde myn herte so moche woo. (ll. 710-713)

Since "pitous" can mean both "piteous" and "full of pity," we cannot be sure whether the narrator is describing the teller or his own reaction, or both. According to one meaning of "dwelle" ("remain," "tarry"), it is he who almost retreats from the conversation. The order of the lines even briefly allows a reading of lines 710-712 as a wise-crack like, "This guy was so self-pitying I could hardly stand to be near him." The shadow of the narrator's criticism of the knight lingers until line 713 excludes it by revealing the narrator's sympathy with the Black Knight's feelings.

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However, the other meaning of "dwelle" ("survive") introduces the limit to the narrator's sympathy: suicide, death through sorrow. Although moved by the Black Knight, the narrator does not abandon his own standards of behavior; he first asks the knight to "have som pitee on your nature" (l. 715) and to contemplate Socrates' stoicism. When the knight says "No... I kan nat soo" (l. 720), the narrator insists:

> "Why so? syr, yis parde!" quod y:
> "Ne say noght soo, for trewely,
> Thogh ye had lost the ferses twelve,
> And ye for sorwe mordred yourselve,
> Ye sholde be dampned in this cas
> By as good ryght as Medea was.... (ll. 721-726)

Immediately after his question (he does not even pause for an answer), rebuke hardens into contradiction ("yis parde!") and a strong assertion which defines the knight as suicidal and condemns him for it. This treatment, although it does not break the knight's mood, is a sign of the narrator's resistance to being engulfed by the knight's feelings. Even if they are part of the same person, this moment of antagonism is an important element of the dynamic between them.

After the knight's long description of White's virtue, the narrator tries to correct him again.

> "By oure Lord," quod I, "y trowe yow wel!
> Hardely, your love was wel beset;
> I not how ye myghte have do bet."
> "Bet? ne no wyght so wel," quod he.
> "Y trowe hyt, sir," quod I, "parde!"
> "Nay, leve hyt wel!" "Sir, so do I;
> I leve yow wel, that trewely
> Yow thoghte that she was the beste,
> And to beholde the alderfayreste,
> Whoso had loked hir with your eyen."
> "With myn? nay, alle that hir seyen
> Seyde and sworen hyt was soo." (ll. 1042-1053)

After a digression that includes the irrelevant story of the death of Achilles, the knight returns to a string of comparisons that shows he has not modified his position at all. He is more prepared to believe that Lucretia's excellence is over-rated than that his opinion of his lady is biased (l. 1086).

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In each of these brief dialogues the narrator is not only differentiating himself from the knight, but also trying to educate the knight, asking him to become aware of his own mental operations. The knight has previously been self-reflective, but in a way that led into a vicious circle that merely intensified his feelings (emphasis mine):

> For *whoso seeth me* first on morwe
> May seyn he hath met with sorwe,
> For y am sorwe, and sorwe ys y.
> Allas! . . . (ll. 595-598)

> For whan that *I avise me* wel,
> And *bethenke me* every del,
> How that ther lyeth in rekenyng,
> In my sorwe, for nothyng;
> And how ther leveth no gladnesse
> May glade me of my distresse,
> And how I have lost suffisance,
> And therto I have no pleasance,
> Than may I say I have ryght noght.
> And *whan al this falleth in my thought*,
> Allas! than am I overcome! (ll. 697-707)

When he thinks about his sadness, he only becomes sadder. He even refers, indirectly of course, to the radical subjectivity into which he is locked, saying that

> . . .whoso wiste al, *by my trouthe*,
> My sorwe, but he hadde rowthe
> And pitee of my sorwes smerte,
> That man hath a fendly herte; (ll. 591-594)

Anyone who knows only the knight's truth *must*, indeed, pity him. The trouthe-routhe rhyme reinforces the logical connection between accepting his subjective view and sympathizing with him. But anyone who is not locked into his thoughts might criticize him This is exactly the reason for the narrator's badgering: he wants the knight to view himself with another's eyes, or at least to admit that other perspectives exist.

The narrator's project is to help the knight return to social discourse, to open him to the influence of others and to remind him that he influences others in return. The project has already begun, since near the beginning of their interview, the narrator says,

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> Loo! how goodly spak thys knyght,
> As hit had be another wyght. (ll. 529-530)

Line 530 asserts the difference between the knight wallowing in self-indulgent grief and the knight relating to an interested audience who promises to "Here yow, as wel as I kan" (l. 757). Telling it *to* someone makes so great a difference that two levels of experience are created: the level of subject matter, which might be as mournful as the knight's news about his lady, and the level of discourse, on which a new relationship is created and which may be the source of pleasure. When the narrator asks him to tell his mournful story, the knight answers, "Blythely" (l. 754). Whether he means that he is glad to oblige, or that he will take pleasure in telling, he acknowledges a new level of experience. The telling takes place in a new time, and with a new tone determined by the presence of the other. Like the narrator, the knight creates a new version of himself through discourse. The narration of the story of the knight's love for White is the art form which creates new versions of each participant, and a new inter-subjectivity, a new relationship. To participate in discourse, we create versions of ourselves, fictions that fit the social context.

If the narrator succeeds in his task, it may be because the story he hears is about a relationship in which mutual openness is mediated by art. The "cure" may be not merely a release for the knight but also an exemplum from his own past about such openness. Although the knight seems unable to acknowledge or understand its significance, his story contains signs that courting White was a demonstration of how art facilitates the creation of a social self. The knight, for instance, admits that love and art are related. By his own definition, love is a "craft" which creates its subjects in just the way that painting creates portraits:

> Paraunter I was therto most able,
> As a whit wal or a table,
> For hit ys redy to cacche and take
> Al that men wil theryn make,
> Whethir so men wil portreye or peynte,
> Be the werkes never so queynte. (ll. 779-784)

The self depends on art. In order to love, one must be created as a lover. Just as the narrator finds the knight "tretable," love finds him impressionable, ready to become what he thinks the role of lover demands.

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When a relationship includes another person, and not just an abstract force, the process is much more complex. The story of the courtship begins with an elaborate portrait of White, a disjointed account which skips back and forth between physical and psychological description (with metaphors of praise liberally added), repeatedly returning to the subject of her "mercy." Sometimes he says her look "granted mercy" and she would never hurt anyone. At other times, he says she did not hesitate to hurt others. The contradiction seems to depend not only on her attitude toward him—whether she was rewarding him or not—but on his acceptance of her otherness—whether he merely annexed her as love object or perceived her as a separate person. Since this issue is so important in the poem's picture of interpersonal dynamics, the knight's account of their relationship is worth examining in some detail.

He tells in a rather involuted sentence how he fell in love:

> And Love, that had wel herd my boone,
> Had espyed me thus soone,
> That she ful sone, in my thoght,
> As helpe me God, so was ykaught
> So sodenly, that I ne tok
> No maner counseyl but at hir lok
> And at myn herte; for-why hir eyen
> So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyen,
> That purely tho myn owne thoght
> Seyde hit were beter serve hir for noght
> Than with another to be wel. (ll. 835-845)

He fell in love, as many courtly lovers do, because the lady's beauty affected his heart. But his is not a case of simple "wounding through the eye." What affected him was not merely her good looks, but her looking. Falling in love involved guessing her feelings by interpreting her expression as desire for him and then closing himself off from all other interpretations. He caught her in his thought and rejected all other counsel. He was as self-enclosed a courtly lover as he is a grieving widower. This imperialistic loving leads to unhappiness.

He elaborates on his lady's look in a long passage (ll. 848-877) which ends with this comment on her mercy:

> Hir eyen semed anoon she wolde
> Have mercy; fooles wenden soo...

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> But ever, me thoght hir eyen seyde,
> 'Be God, my wrathe ys al foryive!" (ll. 866-867, 876-887)

Lines 866-867 perhaps reproduce the order of his experience: first he thought her eyes showed mercy, then he learned that only fools thought so. A fool in this case is someone who expects affection where there has been no verbal communication. He may have been one of those she harmed:

> But many oon with hire lok she herte,
> And that sat hyr ful lyte at herte,
> For she knew nothyng of her thoght;
> But whether she knew, or knew it nowght,
> Algate she ne roughte of hem a stree! (ll. 883-887)

By repeating the conventional comparison of the straw when he tells much later of her rejection of him ("God wot, she acounted nat a stree/Of al my tale, so thoghte me," [ll. 1237-1238]), he suggests that he learned about her harshness through experience. This time "stree" is at the end of the line, linked with "as thoghte me," a phrase which turns him back into his private interpretations of her. Perhaps her rejection of him was caused by his self-enclosure.

If White does not respond to him at first, it is probably because she has been, until his almost strangled "mercy" and his short conventional love speech, completely in the dark about his feelings for her. Her ideas about relationships seem to be informed by traditional classical and medieval ideas of friendship, especially those that discuss friendship as the sharing of a common mind and those that stress the importance of truth-telling in friendship.[12] She is generous to people who can take equal responsibility in a relationship:

> But goode folk, over al other,
> She loved as man may do hys brother;
> Of which love she was wonder large,
> In skilful places that bere charge. (ll. 891-894)

When she does hurt people, it is in the name of honesty, since one of her goals seems to be avoid teasing men. She refuses to flatter (ll. 933-936) or lead men on (ll. 1015-1033). The repeated insistence that

[12] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (London: SPCK, 1972), pp. 106, 103.

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she did no harm (ll. 930-931, 994-998, 1011-1017) can be reconciled with his previous description of her harshness (ll. 883-887) if we see that the knight has really redefined harm. When he was a naive lover who merely wanted to declare his passion, refusal seemed like harm. The later account emphasizes *her* point of view:

> 'Therwith she loved so wel ryght,
> She wrong do wolde to no wyght.
> No wyght myghte do hir noo shame,
> She loved so wel hir owne name,
> Hyr lust to holde no wyght in honde.... (ll. 1015-1019)

Because her sense of her own integrity leads her to be rigorously honest with her admirers, he says

> That Trouthe hymself, over al and al
> Had chose hys maner principal
> In hir, that was his restyng place. (ll. 1003-1005)

The turning point in the courtship comes when they share the same intentions. Although he claimed in his first speech to her that he wished "hir worship for to save" (l. 1230), she seems to have taken his promises as mere campaign rhetoric. She only accepts him when he has opened himself to her:

> I thoughte ones I wolde fonde
> To *do hir knowe and understonde*
> My woo; and *she wel understod*
> That I ne *wilned* thyng but god,
> And worship, and to kepe hir name
> Over alle thyng, and drede her shame,
> And was so besy hyr to serve;
> And pitee were I shulde sterve,
> Syth that I *wilned* noon harm, ywis.
> (ll. 1259-1267, emphasis mine)

When he finally devotes his "thoghte" to teaching her to know him, rather than fantasizing about her, he wins her. The courtship converts their relationship from courtly love into an embodiment of the ideal of equality and sharing, a friendship which lasts throughout their marriage:

> Oure hertes wern so evene a payre,
> That never nas that oon contrayre
> To that other, for no woo.

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For sothe, ylyche they suffred thoo
Oo blysse, and eke oo sorwe bothe;
Ylyche they were bothe glad and wrothe;
'Al was us oon, withoute were. (ll. 1289-1295)

Although he tells this tale, which contains a description of the maturing of his response to White when she was alive, he cannot recapture that response now that she is dead. He has reverted to the earlier solipistic mode and can only describe White's death as something that has happened to *him*. He thinks of her as the occasion for his suffering, saying three times that she is what "I have lost" (ll. 743-744, 1137-1138, 1305-1306). His reference to her death in his mourning lyric is stated wholly in terms of himself when he says that she "Is from me ded and ys agoon" (l. 479). Since "agoon" means not only "die," but also "go away," he is phrasing her death as a departure from him. It is thus significant when the narrator finally gets him to make a statement describing her death objectively.

The formula that states the fact of White's death as his own loss also enforces his distance from the narrator by claiming that the narrator does not understand him. When the narrator objects to the knight's use of a game-playing metaphor, the knight replies, with the formula:

"Thou wost ful lytel what thou menest;
I have lost more than thow wenest." (ll. 743-744)

He repeats the formula after the narrator complains about the length of his story (ll. 1137-1138). However, in the third repetition of this formula, the knight is not using it for its own sake but quoting himself. He simultaneously explains his previous comments and frees himself of the euphemism that has distanced him from the narrator and from the truth about White. The process is painful, and there are several stages to his response to the narrator's question, "where is she now?"

"Now?" quod he, and stynte anoon.
Therwith he wax as ded as stoon,
And seyde, "Allas, that I was bore!
That was the los that here-before
I tolde the that I hadde lorn.
Bethenke how I seyde here-beforn,
'Thow wost ful lytel what thow menest;
I have lost more than thow wenest'—
God wot, allas! ryght that was she!" (ll. 1299-1307)

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Still the narrator pushes him on:

> "Allas, sir, how? what may that be?"
> "She ys ded!" "Nay!" "Yis, be my trouthe!"
> "Is that youre los? By God, hyt ys routhe!" (ll. 1308-1310)

The moment of hesitation in which he becomes deathlike is, not surprisingly, ambiguous. It may be a brief return to the solipsistic sorrow of the beginning of the encounter, but it may also be a final, educative imitation of White that allows him fully to understand, not merely his own grief, but the fact of her death. The imitation of her death is followed by the first non-euphemistic and unselfish statement about her death ("She is ded!") and occasions the narrator's final expression of sympathy.[13] The knight can now indeed swear by his "trouthe" (which means not only "truth" but "promise"), for his words do express truth and do acknowledge an external reality he has previously tried to avoid. In the couplet that again links "trouthe" and "routhe," the knight's allegiance to a more objective reality wins him the narrator's sympathy.

Thus balance is restored for the knight, who all along has described White's death as something that happened to *him*, when the narrator leads him to state it as something that happened to her. The conditions of intersubjectivity between the knight and the lady are fulfilled in such a way that they can now also be fulfilled between the knight and the narrator. As the knight responds adequately to White's death, the narrator can respond fully to the knight's loss. Thus the rules for responding to someone who is dead are the same as those for responding to a person who is standing before you, or to a work of art, in that one must submit to the discourse in order to exist in the form appropriate to the context, and treat the others, no matter how distant, as if they have worlds of their own. The search for intention, hedged in as it is by the impossibility of knowing whether or not we have found it, becomes a matter of ethics.[14]

[13] This is not as extreme as other examples of the medieval fascination with the physical details of death, but may have had the same effect: forcing the mourner to relinquish his claim on the dead.

[14] Although I may disagree with E. D. Hirsch on the probability of achieving "correct understanding," my reading of the poem affirms the view that interpretations are based on guesses about intention. See Hirsch in *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p. 23: "meaning is an affair of consciousness . . . Consciousness is, in turn, an affair of persons, and in textual interpretation the persons involved are an author and a reader."

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As we have seen, at crucial moments the poem acknowledges the role of artifice in shaping the participants and creating a relationship. This occurs again when the narrator wakes up and describes his decision to write a poem about his dream:

> Thoghte I, "Thys ys so queynt a sweven
> That I wol, by processe of tyme,
> Fonde to put this sweven in ryme
> As I kan best, and that anoon."
> This was my sweven; now hit ys doon. (ll. 1330-1334)

Since "tyme" might refer not only to the time it will take to transcribe the poem, but also to the time, that is, meter, in which the poem will be written, and since "process" can have not only its present meaning, but also the meaning of "matter, argument, story," the poet is calling attention to the poem as poem. He is making it into a story about time as the different times of the poem converge. The dreaming of the dream and both the writing and the reading of the poem merge; when he says, "Now hit ys doon," he calls our attention once more to the fact that we have not only been hearing *about* discourse, but participating *in* discourse. The exchange between author and audience may be more limited than that between two contemporaries talking, but it is less so than that between the knight and his mourned wife. This poem pays attention to its audience; we are aware of having our experience as readers taken into account.

With the tyme-ryme couplet, the narrator puts his work into a chain of discourse not only by making it refer to its own form,[15] but also by calling attention to its place in literary history. The narrator imitates Ovid by sympathizing with Ovid's heroine and by writing a poem.

In Chaucer studies, the dialectic between textual and authorial meaning is reflected in studies of the Chaucerian narrator as a persona or as the poet, e. g., E. T. Donaldson, "Chaucer the Pilgrim," *PMLA*, 49 (1954); reprinted in E. T. Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970). Donald R. Howard "Chaucer the Man," *PMLA*, 80 (1965); reprinted in *Chaucer's Mind and Art*, ed. A Cawley (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969). In the *Canterbury Tales* when Harry Bailly first asks Geoffrey the pilgrim for a tale he begins, "What man artow?" (VII. 695). His question is appropriate, but although as interpreters we need the answer, we never can be sure we have it.

[15] He has already made the dream refer to itself in l. 275 when he describes it as "*inly* swete" (emphasis mine), a description which is strikingly different from Macrobius' external criteria for judging dreams as predictions of the future. See also "queynt" l. 1330.

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He commemorates and imitates White by speaking of her, and we both commemorate and imitate the poem by speaking about it with each other. To do so is to continue in an appropriate form the chain of discourse begun by Ovid.

The distance between author and reader, then, is no more threatening than the distance between people who speak face to face, or even that between the self and self-knowledge. Knowing the intention of authors, knowing anyone's intention, is problematic for two reasons: the unavailability of the other's mind, and our own tendencies to impose self-interested readings on the world. The religious consequences of misreading (reading improper works and reading proper works improperly) may have made medieval secular writers anxious about the effect of their writings on others and therefore on their own souls. In the *Book of the Duchess* Chaucer responds by extending it to all human discourse. After all, we are all capable of making not only dead authors but our closest friends into characters in our personal dramas, figures in our dreams. The conversation between narrator and knight is governed by the rules of courtesy which attempt to legislate mutual respect. But the narrator attempts not only to understand, but to change the knight, perhaps for the knight's good and perhaps for reasons of his own. In relationships, we are often both trying to know each other and making each other into white tablets (l. 780) on which we write our own characters—our signs and our own personalities.

The poem is an emblem of this dialectic. It proposes a morally based etiquette of reading through which one tries to understand the author, just as the narrator tries to get the knight to understand White's death as her own. Moreover, it demonstrates that since selves are fictions fitted to specific contexts, a search for "otherness" may lead us not to essences, but to contingencies we have ourselves helped to create. It acknowledges its status as discourse even as it acknowledges that fictions are a necessary part of discourse. The poem is circular (since the end will always return us to the beginning of the writing process and the experience that prompted it) and is part of a linear but never-ending chain of texts and interpretations through rereading and rewriting.

In other words, Chaucer's solution is a description, a bringing to consciousness of the conditions that shape interactions. Like the dream which simultaneously reveals, corrects, and forgives the narrator's self-destructive feelings, rather than repressing the dangers of interaction, it includes and expresses them. It answers medieval anxiety about

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fiction by making its causes part of the poem. The liabilities of fiction are most dangerous when unacknowledged.

If the poem is therapeutic, it may be so not just for the knight, but for the audience, and for Chaucer himself, who was with this, his first long poem, embarking on a new relationship to fiction and to his audience. Just as the narrator's deference and humility toward the Black Knight might reflect Chaucer's relationship to his aristocratic patron, his emphasis on the other as subject and his implied emphasis on authorial intention might be addressed to his audience, especially his readers, but also any in his audience who were wary of fiction. His ethics of reading are a response to fiction, which can be neither tamed nor avoided. Chaucer seems to have known what twentieth century psychologists have since proved empirically: not to dream is unnatural and unhealthy. The other side of Alcyone's " dedly " sleep is the dream, which, like fiction, is an integral part of ordinary life.[16]

[16] I am grateful to the NEH for a Fellowship in Residence for College Teachers, during which I wrote the first draft of this essay. I am grateful to William L. Lee, Charles Dawe, Douglas N. Archibald and Judith Grossman for their comments and suggestions.

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HAROLD WEBER *

'One who held it in disdain': The Tragic Satirist in Pope's Final Works

I

In his "Preface" to the Twickenham edition of the *Imitations of Horace*, John Butt declares that the "Epilogue to the Satires" is "among the most Horatian of Pope's original work."[1] In the last decade John Aden has supported this position, including a discussion of the "Epilogue" in his book *Something Like Horace*.[2] Yet Butt's judgment is not universally accepted and recently has come into question. Peter Dixon has observed that in the "Epilogue" the growth of the satirist's moral stature culminates, revealing most distinctly the impatient tones of the serious and plain-spoken moralist.[3] And Howard Weinbrot, in his new study of *Augustus Caesar in 'Augustan' England*, specifically takes issue with Butt, discovering in the "Epilogue" a rejection of Horace as a satiric model in favor of Juvenal.[4]

This confusion over the nature of the "Epilogue" is not without cause. The two dialogues of the "Epilogue" continue, for the most part, the conversational and indirect Horatian mode of satire characteristic of the rest of the *Imitations*. Further, as Aden points out, the "Epilogue" is distinctly Horatian in its use of the satiric adversary, a device used by Horace and Persius, but hardly at all by Juvenal.[5] Yet Pope's success in adopting the Horatian style and idiom in

* Harold Weber is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Tulane University.

[1] John Butt, "Preface," in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1939-69), IV, vii. All references to the poetry of Pope are taken from this Twickenham edition.

[2] John Aden, *Something Like Horace: Studies in the Art and Allusion of Pope's Horatian Satires* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 19-26.

[3] Peter Dixon, *The World of Pope's Satires* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1968), pp. 12-13.

[4] Howard Weinbrot, *Augustus Caesar in 'Augustan' England* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 137-41. Mr. Weinbrot's earlier book, *The Formal Strain: Studies in Augustan Imitation and Satire* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), deals well with the shifts in tone throughout the *Imitations of Horace*.

[5] Aden, p. 26.

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much of the "Epilogue" should not obscure his dramatic departure from Horace's appreciation of the world. A new understanding of Pope's satiric personae is in order, an understanding which can describe more precisely the wide range of Pope's satiric practice.

In the first part of this essay I will argue that Pope's tone in the "Epilogue" does indeed differ substantially from his tone in the rest of the *Imitations*. And, since a satirist's tone depends on his vision of the world, in the movement from the body of the *Imitations* to the "Epilogue," the modulation in tone reflects a comparable displacement in the vision of society which Pope offers. In the "Epilogue" Pope abandons the comic pose which he assumed in the *Imitations*. The corruption which the poet now discovers in the world overwhelms the comic satirist and forces him to redefine his satiric role. In a world where vice no longer fears to declare itself openly, where the covert evil of Sporus gives way to the brazen stupidity of the "Friend," the comic satirist, with his emphasis on irony and indirection, cannot adequately confront the corruption which threatens him. The tragic overtones apparent even in Pope's comic posture become dominant, and in the two dialogues of the "Epilogue" Pope stands forth as the solitary and heroic tragic satirist.

In the second part of the essay I intend to discuss the relationship between the "Epilogue" and the fourth book of *The Dunciad*. The confusion over the nature of the former probably accounts for the fact that little has been done to relate the tragic resonances of the "Epilogue" to the poet's final tragic vision in the fourth book of *The Dunciad*. Aside from the unfinished fragment "1740," however, Pope produced no new work in the years between the completion of the "Epilogue" and his revision of *The Dunciad*; and when we recognize the correspondence between the visions of evil informing the two works, it becomes clear that a number of suggestive parallels exist. A recognition of the links between the final original works of Pope's career should help us to understand the larger movements of that career, which passes from ideal affirmation to tragic negation, from "God's eternal Day" ("Messiah," l. 104) to Chaos' "eternal Night" (*The Dunciad*, IV, l. 2).

II

Ironically enough, we may begin to appreciate the extent of Pope's satiric metamorphosis by attending to one of Pope's most celebrated enemies, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu:

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Satire shou'd, like a polish'd Razor keen,
Wound with a Touch, that's scarcely felt or seen,
Thine is an Oyster-Knife, that hacks and hews;
The Rage, but not the Talent to Abuse;
And is in *Hate*, what *Love* is in the Stews.
'Tis the gross *Lust* of Hate, that still annoys,
Without Distinction, as gross Love enjoys:
Neither to Folly, nor to Vice confin'd;
The Object of thy Spleen is Human Kind:
It preys on all, who yield or who resist;
To Thee 'tis Provocation to exist.[6]

Part of the intermittent warfare that marked the aftermath of their friendship, these lines were included in Lady Mary's response to a couplet in Pope's imitation of *Satires* II. i—"From furious *Sappho* scarce a milder Fate,/P—x'd by her Love, or libell'd by her Hate" (ll. 83-84). Lady Mary's appropriation of the terms of Pope's couplet (love and hate) reveals shrewdness and wit, though her charges—the standard claim that the satirist is nothing more than a mad misanthropist—are banal and groundless when applied to *Satires* II. i. Yet when applied to Pope's final compositions her criticisms are not without force and logic. Both the "Epilogue" and the fourth book of *The Dunciad* display an intensity and passion not consistently found in Pope's other satires. Few passages in Pope, as critics now recognize, are as sublime as the opening and closing of Book IV; and few passages are as coarse and shocking as the lines on the hogs of Westphaly in "Dialogue II." This increase in emotion surely reflects Pope's increased disillusionment with his age and his concluding note to the "Epilogue" provides, in fact, a warrant for Lady Mary's perceptions: "This was the last poem of the kind printed by our author . . . a sort of PROTEST against the insuperable corruption and depravity of manners, which he had been so unhappy as to live to see" (note to ll. 254-55).[7]

This note is disturbing, partially because it does, in Lady Mary's

[6] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace," in *Essays and Poems*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), ll. 23-35.

[7] Though this note was not added to the poem until 1751, there is little reason to doubt its authenticity. See John Butt's "Introduction" to Volume IV of the Twickenham Pope, pp. xxxix-xl. Butt concludes that the note was written by Pope in 1743 or 1744.

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words, damn "Human Kind" and level all, except the satirist, "without Distinction." In spite of this, however, the note is not out of place in the *Imitations*, for it completes the satiric fiction which Pope has developed. Pope extends his comic satiric persona as far as possible and the satirist's contention that it is now impossible to write satire perfectly completes the disillusionment of the "Epilogue." The comic satirist of the *Imitations* no longer believes in his ability to teach, for the power of satire to reform has been revealed as an illusion. Unless he would simply rail, the satirist can now do little but sink into a profound, if disgruntled silence; a silence which prefigures the final silence of *The Dunciad*.

Yet the note which concludes "Dialogue II" does more than simply complete the satiric persona which Pope has developed. That note, like the final couplet in "Dialogue I"—"Yet may this Verse (if such a Verse remain)/Show there was one who held it in disdain"—asks us to step out of the satiric fiction, to recognize that our poet no longer rests content with the figure he has defined as the satirist. Both the note and the couplet, set off as they are from the main body of the poem, call attention to the man behind the mask, to his insistence that the satiric fiction can no longer adequately contain or do battle with vice. "Vice with such Giant-strides comes on amain" ("Dialogue II," l. 6) that the virtuous man must declare himself. What really disturbs us about the note is that it forces us to connect the satirist to the poet, the poetic ideal Pope creates with Pope the man.

One of the cornerstones of modern Pope criticism, most forcefully developed by Maynard Mack in his essay "The Muse of Satire," is that one can profitably study Pope's satire only by recognizing, "even in these apparently very personal poems," the distinction between "the historical Alexander Pope and the dramatic Alexander Pope who speaks them."[8] We must not forget—according to Mack—the rhetorical and dramatic character of the satiric genre, its use of conventional personae and modes of procedure.

Few critics have quarreled with Mack's position and its general acceptance has clearly been a boon for Pope studies. Freed from the necessity of having to apologize for the less savory aspects of Pope's

[8] Maynard Mack, "The Muse of Satire," in *Yale Review*, 40 (1951), 83. The most searching criticism of Mack's position is that of Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Personae," in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature: Essays in Honor of Alan Dugald McKillop*, ed. Charles Carroll Camden (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 25-37.

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biography, critics have been able to explore both the aesthetic and moral dimensions of Pope's art. By accepting the fictitiousness of Pope's satiric utterance, critics have managed to lay aside the question of Pope's personal malice, and to devote themselves to a contemplation of his considerable artistic achievements. Mack's lead has helped modern scholarship abandon the moralistic censure of the nineteenth century, which could often do little more than regret that such a master craftsman should have been such an immoral man.[9]

I have little reason to complain of Mack's position and much of this essay attempts to explain more precisely Pope's movement between two of the satiric masks which Mack describes: the satirist as *vir bonus* and the satirist as hero. Yet, if I am correct about the conclusion of the two dialogues, then part of the definition of the satirist as hero depends, in Pope, on his decision to make explicit the correspondence between the writer and his satire. In moving to a tragic frame, Pope feels that he must destroy the surface of his fiction; to separate the man and his persona becomes, at this point, something we are asked not to do. In the world of the "Epilogue" Pope can maintain his satiric integrity only by declaring his personal, as well as artistic, separation from the world. The distinction between poet and man, the satirist insists, is an illusion; in the world of tragic satire Pope defines the satirist and the poet as one.

The Horatian pretense of comic satire will no longer suffice as a response to the world of the "Epilogue." The opening of "Dialogue I" makes clear why:

> But *Horace*, Sir, was delicate, was nice;
> *Bubo* observes, he lash'd no sort of *Vice*:
> *Horace* would say, *Sir* Billy *serv'd the Crown*,
> Blunt *could do Bus'ness*, H-ggins *knew the Town*,
> In *Sappho* touch the *Failing of the Sex*,
> In rev'rend Bishops note some *small Neglects*,
> And own, the *Spaniard* did a *waggish thing*,
> Who cropt our Ears, and sent them to the King.
> His sly, polite, insinuating stile
> Could please at Court, and make Augustus smile:

[9] This attitude, of course, is not restricted to the nineteenth century. In James Reeves' new book, *The Reputation and Writings of Alexander Pope* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), Pope's satires are once again seen as expressions of insincerity and immorality.

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> An artful Manager, that crept between
> His Friend and Shame, and was a kind of *Screen.*
> (lines 11-22)

Horace can no longer provide a viable satiric model, though the charges made against Horace are all false. These lines are delivered, after all, by the "Friend," a character whom Pope takes care to define in a note to line 1 as "an impertinent Censurer." The friend is no more correct about Horace than he is later when he tells Pope that the proper mode of satire "may lash the Greatest—in Disgrace" (l. 88). In forgetting this dramatic strategy, Howard Weinbrot goes astray, for he regards the lines above as a true reflection of "Pope's calm judgment of the ally of Virgil." [10]

The point of these lines, however, is not that Horace was a "Screen," or "artful Manager" who protected his friends—such charges are clearly directed at Walpole—but that in the corrupt world of the "Epilogue" he will be so interpreted. In this world Horatian humor and indirection lose their point, for they serve not to teach, but to convince others that the satirist is as corrupt as they. In the "Epilogue" Pope demonstrates that in the tragic world the comic satirist finds both his integrity and convictions attacked: those qualities which grant the comic satirist moral stature in the comic world (his indirection and irony) are here taken only as evidence of corruption, as objects of censure. Horatian delicacy is simply not understood when "'Nothing is Sacred now but Villany'" (Dialogue I," l. 170).

The two dialogues of the "Epilogue" dramatically represent the incapacity of Horatian satire to deal with the world in which the poet now finds himself. But this failure reveals the impoverishment not of comic satire, but of the world which refuses to accept it. In both dialogues, the Horatian satirist, using all his powers of persuasion, tries to reveal to the "Friend"—the representative of that unenlightened and corrupt world—the bankruptcy of the friend's definition of satire. In both dialogues the satirist fails and his failure indicates not, as the friend would have it, the corruption of the comic satirist, but the inadequacy of comic satire as a method of reform. If the quality of its social intercourse defines the world of the *Imitations*, the inability of the satirist to communicate with his adversary marks the breakdown of that world. Conversation in the "Epilogue" leads nowhere—language is losing its power and society no longer exists as a place where rational voices may correct one another.

[10] Weinbrot, *Augustus Caesar*, p. 140.

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In "Dialogue I" Pope tries to reveal the worthlessness of the friend's position by pretending to accept it. As if dealing with a child, Pope hopes to demonstrate the friend's foolishness by indulging him until the absurdity of his arguments appears obvious. Thus, to the friend's insistence that we should "Laugh then at any, but at Fools or Foes" (l. 53), Pope capitulates and responds

> Dear Sir, forgive the Prejudice of Youth:
> Adieu Distinction, Satire, Warmth, and Truth!
> Come harmless *Characters* that no one hit....
> (lines 63-65)

To the friend's insistence that "You still may lash the Greatest—in Disgrace," Pope again agrees, beginning the long description of vice triumphant by swearing "Good Heav'n forbid, that I shou'd blast their Glory" (l. 105). Pope's irony, of course, is obvious to every reader, but it fails completely to impress the "Friend." Blind to irony, he dare not see what Pope sees so well: that by accepting the friend's assumptions about satire and vice, satire becomes its opposite, panegyric. And not just panegyric, but a celebration of vice itself:

> Let *Greatness* own her, and she's mean no more:
> Her Birth, her Beauty, Crowds and Courts confess,
> Chaste Matrons praise her, and grave Bishops bless:
> (lines 144-46)

The world of the "Epilogue" would invert satire entirely, leaving it not just useless, but implicated in the corruption surrounding it. The tableau of vice triumphant represents precisely the celebration of vice that satire would become in such a world. The satirist's only defence, then, is to separate himself entirely from such a world, to prove by his isolation that "there was one who held it in disdain" (l. 172). Confronted by a society bent on misunderstanding him, the mask of tragic satire provides the satirist with his only possible response.

Proceeding in a manner similar to "Dialogue I," "Dialogue II" leads toward the same conclusions. Again Pope demonstrates a desire to "please you [the friend], if I knew with what" (l. 26); and again this compliance leads the friend to reveal the inadequacy of his conception of satire. When Pope names names the friend labels it "Libel." Is Pope to "Spare then the Person, and expose the Vice" (l. 12)? When he does so the friend cries "Scandal!" Is Pope to "spare the Knight"? Yes, but he cannot "hunt the Squires" either (ll. 30-31). Should

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Pope deny the satirist's spleen by praising when he can? Yes, but when he does the friend accuses those praised of ambition and corruption. Turn as he might, Pope can make no sense of the friend's strictures, can discover no path left for comic satire to take. Further, he again finds the strengths of the Horatian satirist used against him. Thus, his circle of friends, which should attest to his humanity and virtue, is converted into evidence of his corruption, for "They too may be corrupted" (l. 126) and "are out, and would be in" (l. 123).

As "Dialogue II" progresses it becomes clear that the satirist has little choice, if he would continue to speak, but to embrace his pride and isolation. To reach an accommodation with the friend and his world is impossible; the friend would simply define satire out of existence, leaving it no proper targets, no proper mode of procedure, no moral center. In such a world, in fact, satire receives the blame for the very vice it would correct:

> You make men desp'rate if they once are bad:
> Else might he take to Virtue some years hence—
> (lines 59-60)

The comic satirist no longer has a place and, having played the friend's game for much of the poem, Pope must finally declare himself:

> *Fr.* You're strangely proud.
> *P.* So proud, I am no Slave:
> So impudent, I own myself no Knave:
> So odd, my Country's Ruin makes me grave.
> Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
> Men not afraid of God, afraid of me:
> (lines 205-09)

In accepting and celebrating his pride, Pope turns his back on the world of comic satire. In the final forty-five lines of the poem he develops, more completely than ever before, the scope of his tragic persona. There is nothing comic about Pope's final speech, nothing ironic or conversational or self-effacing in Pope's final declaration. No longer is his wit "*Apocrypha*," as it was at the conclusion of "Donne IV":

> *Courts* are too much for Wits so weak as mine;
> Charge them with Heav'n's Artill'ry, bold *Divine*!
> From such alone the Great Rebukes endure,

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Whose *Satyr's sacred*, and whose *Rage secure.*
'Tis mine to wash a few slight Stains; but theirs
To deluge Sin, and drown a Court in Tears.
Howe'er, what's now *Apocrypha*, my Wit,
In time to come, may pass for *Holy Writ.*
(lines 280-87)

The promise of that poem finds fulfillment in the conclusion of "Dialogue II," for Pope breaks down the distinction between the sacred satire of the "bold *Divine*" and his own meagre wit. Pope's satire can now pass for "*Holy Writ*" and the satirist unabashedly wields a "sacred Weapon":

O sacred Weapon! left for Truth's defence,
Sole Dread of Folly, Vice, and Insolence!
To all but Heav'n-directed hands deny'd,
The Muse may give thee, but the Gods must guide.
(lines 212-15)

Satire can be celebrated in no higher terms. Pope no longer thinks of satire solely as an art, for its power depends not just on the Muse, but on God. The satirist "poses" no longer—he now demands recognition as a prophet, as a religious authority sanctified by his relationship to the Truth of God, a Truth which "guards the Poet, sanctifies the line,/And makes Immortal, Verse as mean as mine" (ll. 246-47). In spite of all those Pope has praised in the course of the poem—and the list is considerable—he now stands alone; his "the last Pen," his the last voice to challenge the "degen'rate Line!"

The poet can no longer convert loss into triumph and the friend's jest about "An Essay on Man," which ends the poem, fails to blunt the tragic force of the "Epilogue." In reminding us of the earlier poem, the friend serves only to make explicit the distance the satirist has travelled, to throw into relief the transformation both of the satirist and his world:

God loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads,
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race,

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> Wide and more wide, th'o'erflowings of the mind
> Take ev'ry creature in, of ev'ry kind;
> Earth smiles around, with boundless bounty blest,
> And Heav'n beholds its image in his breast.
> ("An Essay on Man," IV, 361-72)

This vision of harmonious circularity which concludes "An Essay on Man" is replaced by the excremental vision of the hogs of Westphaly, whose "beastly Line" recapitulates the triumphal procession of Vice—"Our Youth, all liv'ry'd o'er with foreign Gold,/Before her dance; behind her crawl the Old" ("Dialogue I," ll. 155-56). What once was divine in man has been lost and now only the poet—through his satire—can claim a true and vital relationship to God.

III

The most important of the parallels between the "Epilogue" and the four book *Dunciad*—important because it helps explain why Pope chose to abandon the comic pose for the tragic—involves Pope's recognition, expressed most directly in the final note to "Dialogue II," that "bad men were grown so shameless and so powerful, that Ridicule was become as unsafe as it was ineffectual." I refer not to the threatened censorship of the press, which certainly worried Pope, but to Pope's concern for the effectiveness of satire when vice has grown shameless. The vast bulk of satire, from Roman times to the present, deals with a vice that masquerades as virtue. The most common metaphor for satire is that it "strips away" the appearance of virtue which vice affects, and Mary Claire Randolph's discussion of medicinal imagery in Elizabethan satire remains the most influential treatment of the power of this metaphor.[11] Satire functions as a scourge, a knife, a whip, a sword, precisely because it must remove the veneer of virtue which vice uses to clothe its foul shape.

We have become accustomed, then, to regard the elevation of appearance over reality as the mark of a corrupt individual or society, this elevation made necessary not only by the shame of evil, but by its desire to seduce the unwary. Affected behavior is thus a cause for moral outrage, just as it is also the cause of laughter:

> The only Source of the true Ridiculous (as it appears to me)
> is Affectation.... Now Affectation proceeds from one of these

[11] Mary Claire Randolph, "The Medical Concept in English Renaissance Satiric Theory," in *Studies in Philogy*, 38 (1941), 125-57.

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> two Causes, Vanity or Hypocrisy: for as Vanity puts us on affecting false Characters, in order to purchase Applause; so Hypocrisy sets us on an Endeavour to avoid Censure, by concealing our Vices under an Appearance of their opposite Virtues.[12]

The attempt to confuse appearance and reality—or the inability to distinguish between them—draws both our laughter and our scorn. What rouses these responses in a fairy tale as simple as "The Emperor's New Clothes" is not the emperor's nakedness, but his mistaken notion that he is in fact clothed. His failure to distinguish the real demonstrates his personal inadequacy, while his attempt to confuse others demonstrates his public immorality.

What lies at the bottom of Pope's adoption of the tragic voice, however, is the grim recognition that vice need no longer affect virtue; the emperor no longer bothers to pretend he is clothed. So pervasive is vice now, that evil men are without shame, no longer pretending to be what they are not. In "Arbuthnot" Sporus is particularly dangerous because we may fail to penetrate beyond his paint, his "gilded Wings"—we may, like Arbuthnot, dismiss him as simply a pretty butterfly, and Sporus' power as a tempter arises because we see only his "Cherub's face." In the fourth book of *The Dunciad* this gilding or pretense is no longer necessary. Though part of the "gay embroider'd race," the "glorious Youth" just returned from his continental tour is proud of his vacuity; he need not pretend to have anything "but a Solo in his head" (l. 324). Vice triumphs in the "Epilogue" and *The Dunciad* precisely because it can celebrate itself openly; no longer need it manipulate appearance: no one hesitates to embrace it for what it is. Like the naked poets who strut about in Book III, the new hero of *The Dunciad* no longer "pretendeth to *Virtues* we *have not*, but [maintains] the laudable ambition of being *gazed* at for glorying in those *Vices* which all the world know *we have*" ("Ricardus Aristarchus of the Hero of the Poem," p. 257, ll. 10-12).

Pope, of course, was neither the first satirist, nor the last, to deal with vice's disregard of hypocrisy. In his exciting essay on "Pope and Dulness," Emrys Jones deals with the tradition of *adoxography*, "the rhetorical praise or defence of things of doubtful value."[13] Eras-

[12] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 7-8.

[13] Emrys Jones, "Pope and Dulness," in *Pope: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J. V. Guerinot (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 129.

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mus' *Praise of Folly*—according to Jones—was only the most famous of a number of such works which Pope would have known. In our own century, Evelyn Waugh has remarked that the corrupt have grown so brazen that vice no longer even pays lip service to virtue;[14] and such a recognition clearly informs a novel like *Decline and Fall.*

Pope's adoption of this rhetoric, then, is by no means unique, though I do not think we can exaggerate its importance. However corrupt the world of "An Essay on Man" or the *Imitations*, we can take some comfort, however cold, in vice's recognition that it must at least affect a virtuous appearance. Though such hypocrisy creates a considerable danger for the unwary, it reminds us nevertheless that virtue remains the universal standard—even when vice betrays and disregards that standard it must pretend not to, and such pretense implicitly demonstrates the inferiority and inadequacy of vice.[15] Vice triumphs completely only when such pretense no longer seems necessary, when "'Not to be corrupted is the Shame.'" When "All, all look up, with reverential Awe,/On Crimes that scaype, or triumph o'er the Law" ("Dialogue I," ll. 160, 167-68) we recognize the inverted world which the satirist must confront.

This inversion probably accounts for the enthronement of Cibber in *The Dunciad* of 1743. Though critics have traditionally discovered in Cibber's "A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope" (summer 1742) the reason for Pope's replacement of Theobald, it seems more valuable, more central to Pope's poetic concerns, to see *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (spring 1740) as the true source of Cibber's elevation to the throne. We need look no further than the opening of Chapter I to see how perfectly Cibber epitomizes a world in which vice no longer concerns itself with appearing as anything else:

[14] Evelyn Waugh, "Fan-Fare," in *Life*, 8 April 1946, p. 60.

[15] Swift makes just such a point in "A Project for the Advancement of Religion, and the Reformation of Manners," in *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939-63), II, 57:

> Hypocrisy is much more eligible than open Infidelity and Vice: it wears the Livery of Religion, it acknowledgeth her Authority, and is cautious of giving Scandal. Nay, a long continued Disguise is too great a Constraint upon human Nature, especially an *English* Disposition. Men would leave off their Vices out of meer Weariness, rather than undergo the Toil and Hazard, and perhaps Expence of practising them perpetually in private. And, I believe, it is often with Religion as it is with Love; which by much Dissembling, at last grows real.

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> And now you will say, the World will find me, under my own Hand, a weaker Man than perhaps I may have pass'd for, even among my Enemies.—With all my Heart! my Enemies will then read me with Pleasure, and you, perhaps, with Envy, when you find that Follies, without the Reproach of Guilt upon them, are not inconsistent with Happiness.—But why make my Follies publick? Why not? I have pass'd my Time very pleasantly with them, and I don't recollect that they have ever been hurtful to any other Man living. Even admitting they were injudiciously chosen, would it not be Vanity in me to take Shame to myself for not being found a Wise Man? Really, Sir, my Appetites were in too much haste to be happy, to throw away my Time in pursuit of a Name I was sure I could never arrive at.[16]

The easy charm of this passage, Cibber's amused and worldly self-detachment, would not, we may rest assured, have tickled Pope. Ill at ease with even the limited self-derision of the Horatian satirist, Pope remained throughout his life grimly aware of the necessity for dramatizing a self larger and more coherent than he may have possessed. Pope's careful revision of his correspondence, his refusal to acknowledge the bawdy "Sober Advice from Horace," his subterfuge in the publication of many of his works—all attest to the poet's obsession with creating a public image which would reveal the heroic self hidden by the deformed figure of a Roman Catholic satirist. Cibber's easy indifference to his moral stature could only strike Pope as an affront, an abnegation of one's moral responsibility. In not bothering to hide his corruption, Cibber has abandoned himself to Dulness, embraced a passivity that denies all aspiration: "Soft on her lap her Laureat son reclines" (*The Dunciad*, IV, l. 20). Even in *The Dunciad* of 1729 Pope proceeded with the conventional certainty that "Deformity becomes the object of ridicule when a man sets up for being handsome: and so must Dulness when he sets up for a Wit" ("A Letter to the Publisher," p. 17, ll. 11-13). The final *Dunciad* declares itself a new poem because Cibber overturns this certainty, for he "was one, who from every Folly (not to say Vice) of which another would be ashamed, has constantly derived a Vanity" ("Advertisement to the Reader," p. 251).

When vice no longer fears to reveal itself, when the minions of

[16] Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, ed. B. R. S. Fone (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 5.

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Dulness take pride in their deformity and revel in the freedom to flaunt their vacuity, we recognize that legitimate society no longer exists. The norms of a truly moral community have suffered a fundamental inversion, corresponding, in *The Dunciad* of 1748, to a similar inversion in the world of nature. In *The Dunciad* of 1728 the world of Dulness represents but a grotesque parody of the natural world. The image of cosmic health and harmony which concluded " An Essay on Man "—the series of concentric circles radiating out from the fall of a pebble in a lake (quoted earlier)—was itself a revision of an earlier and nasty image in Book II of the original *Dunciad*:

> As what a Dutchman plumps into the lakes,
> One circle first, and then a second makes,
> What Dulness dropt among her sons imprest
> Like motion, from one circle to the rest;
> (lines 373-76)

Dunciad A is alive with such images of extension, which exhibit the increasing sway enjoyed by Dulness. To rectify, however, is not to invert; and *The Dunciad* of 1728 represents nothing more than a corrupt parody of the healthy world. Only in the fourth book of the revised *Dunciad*, when Dulness completes and celebrates her triumph, does Pope reveal the true inversion of the natural world:

> None want a place, for all their Centre found,
> Hung to the Goddess, and coher'd around.
> Not closer, orb in orb, conglob'd are seen
> The buzzing Bees about their dusky Queen.
> (lines 77-80)

The center is no longer a source of energy, an animating and life giving focus of vitality. Instead of radiating outward, all is drawn inward and the center of Dulness becomes the eye of an irresistable maelstrom, as

> a vast involuntary throng,
> Who gently drawn, and struggling less and less,
> Roll in her Vortex, and her pow'r confess.
> (lines 82-84)

The world of Dulness implodes and her center becomes the massive core of a dead star. In her final form Dulness seems to exist only as anti-matter and the universe she creates is a black hole.

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Over a half century before Pope's final vision of *The Dunciad*, Rochester had written of Chaos as

> thou elder brother even to Shade
> Thou hadst a being ere the world was made,
> And well fixed, art alone of ending not afraid.[17]

In his final works Pope gives substance to Rochester's vision, demonstrating, in the tableau of vice triumphant which concludes "Dialogue I" and the triumph of Dulness in the fourth book of *The Dunciad*, the breakdown of civilization. In such a world the comic satirist is unable to meet the challenge which evil presents. The irony, indirection, and role-playing which distinguish the comic satirist's attempts to deflate evil will no longer suffice, and Pope abandons his comic pose. For the satirist the challenge is now to separate himself from the corruption which surrounds him, and to demonstrate that a truth not available to those who serve Dulness animates his verse. To such a task only the tragic satirist is suited.

[17] John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, "Upon Nothing," in *The Complete Poems*, ed. David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), ll. 1-3.

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ROSEMARIE BODENHEIMER •

The Romantic Impasse in "A Passage to India"

During the trial scene at the crisis of *A Passage to India*, Adela Quested has a romantic vision. The narrative describes her experience in terms which link it unmistakably with the process of imaginative recollection and re-creation that Wordsworth describes in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* and portrays in his poetry. Once on the witness stand, Adela stops thinking or remembering her day at the Marabar Hills "in the ordinary way of memory," and finds the heightening distance of poetic creation: "now she was of it and not of it at the same time, and this double relationship gave it indescribable splendour." [1] The landscape which had dulled her senses at the time of the expedition now seems alive, welcoming, and active: "Now the sun rose again, the elephant waited, the pale masses of rock flowed around her and presented the first cave; she entered, and a match was reflected in the polished walls—all beautiful and significant, though she had been blind to it at the time" (228). And Adela becomes the poet of the sensory experience she had missed: "As she spoke, she created the Kawa Dol, saw the niches up the curve of the stone, and felt the heat strike her face" (228).

The sense of reciprocal activity between person and landscape, creator and created, recalling romantic poetry, also associates Adela with the shaping vision of the novel's narrator. In this role, she momentarily transcends her personal confusion, and achieves a minimal heroism. Though it remains unspoken, the vision results in the truth, compelling Adela to withdraw her charges against Aziz.

Yet the vision itself is clearly untrue to her experience at the Marabar, which is described precisely as a frustration of romantic expectation. There, the sunrise fails to conform to the mind's desire for dramatic form in natural events; "at the supreme moment, when night should have died and the day lived, nothing occurred" (137). The Kawa Dol, its heat generating confusion of mind, is described as "granite, very dead and quiet" (141). The whole episode, including a com-

• Rosemarie Bodenheimer is an Assistant Professor of English at Boston College.

[1] E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1924), p. 227. Subsequent quotations will be indicated by page numbers in the text.

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parison with Wordsworth's Grasmere, "romantic but manageable" (138), is designed to overwhelm characters and readers with the gap between human imagination—at least in its Western romantic and religious terms—and the Indian landscape. Why, then, does Forster make Adela's moment of truth on trial dependent on a romantic revision?

A full set of answers to that question and the others it raises leads into the thick of the struggle with romantic poetics which pervades the narrative of *A Passage to India*. Critics who focus on Forster's romantic roots tend to stress the failure of romantic response implicit in Forster's treatment of the Indian landscape.[2] Malcolm Bradbury, helpfully pointing out the constant mixture of Victorian and modern elements in Forster's work, nonetheless sees the Marabar Caves in modernist terms, as exposing "the final nullity of romanticism... the visionary hope is lost in the face of an unspeaking and utterly alien nature, a nature only self-reflecting."[3] Yet, as I will later show in more detail, Forster's own description of the caves is couched in his most romantic diction, mixing human and natural terms in a prose passage which approaches lyric poetry. The novel simply does not come to rest in a post-romantic vision, or even, for that matter, in a late-Victorian, Hardy-esque pessimism. More accurately, it must be seen as a narrative deeply and frankly divided against itself, split between Forster's aesthetic and moral belief in the formal beauty of romantic vision, and his serious distrust of the fictions created by language and memory.

The nature of Forster's struggle with his Wordsworthian literary heritage can be seen when the landscape passages so central to the novel are read rhetorically rather than symbolically. It is common to make symbols of the prominent features in Forster's landscape: the impartial perspective of the sky, the womb-like enclosure of the caves, and so on.[4] I propose instead to investigate the landscape passages as sequences of description that have their sources in other descriptive traditions—

[2] In addition to Bradbury, see James McConkey, *The Novels of E. M. Forster* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 59, 83, and 148.

[3] Malcolm Bradbury, "Two Passages to India: Forster as Victorian and Modern," in *A Pasage to India*, ed. Bradbury (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 228.

[4] McConkey's book offers illuminating symbolic readings which stress the novel's metaphorical unity, pp. 132-160. Wilfred Stone's interest in archetypal imagery dominates his discussion of the setting in *The Cave and the Mountain* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 289-317.

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in poetry, or travel narrative. Read in that way, and set next to Forster's emphasis on the failure of language in the characters' experiences, the landscape writing demonstrates the stress in Forster's relation to his art during the composition of his last novel.

India offered to Forster a landscape that had not already been domesticated in a pastoral literary tradition. As P. N. Furbank records in his biography, Forster was always to feel that it baffled description, inducing blankness of mind.[5] In *The Hill of Devi* Forster himself talks about his troubles with description:

> I began the novel before my 1921 visit, and took out the opening chapters with me, with the intention of continuing them. But as soon as they were confronted with the country they purported to describe, they seemed to wilt and go dead and I could do nothing with them. I used to look at them of an evening in my room at Dewas, and feel only distaste and despair. The gap between India remembered and India experienced was too wide. When I got back to England the gap narrowed, and I was able to resume.[6]

A few years later he returned to the theme in an interview, again recalling his difficulty with the novel. What he had written after his first visit "wasn't India at all. It was like sticking a photograph on a picture. However, I couldn't *write* it when I was in India. When I got away I could get on with it...."[7]

"Sticking a photograph on a picture": the tease of that phrase is an appropriate introduction to Forster's skepticism about the relation of art to reality. If experience itself is "picture," the "real India" which Forster seeks—along with his fictional "quester," Adela—is unavailable through the human sensory apparatus. Adela's falsified re-vision during the trial is thus a version of the writer's own dilemma: when she gets away she can get on with making a formed and controlled memory of her visit to the Marabar Caves.

Thirty years after *A Passage to India* was published, then, Forster was still puzzling over the gap between experience and memory. The

[5] P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977), I, 226.

[6] E. M. Forster, *The Hill of Devi* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953), p. 238.

[7] See Forster's interview with P. N. Furbank and F. J. H. Haskell, Cambridge, 20 June 1952, published in *Writers at Work: the 'Paris Review' Interviews*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958), p. 28.

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gap appears everywhere in the narrative, as both narrator and characters try to name their experiences, to find adequate languages of response. Although the issue of social and spiritual unity, so often discussed in criticism, is indeed an overt theme, the novel is to a large extent dominated by actions and figures of speech that reflect Forster's preoccupation with the disjunctions between human experience, non-human reality, and the language which tries hopelessly to mediate.

The difficulty of inventing an appropriate language is dramatized in the opening chapter, which consists of an ascending sequence of descriptive styles. For Alan Wilde, who has given close attention to these paragraphs, the changes in perspective assert "the relativism of human perception," expressed in a carefully urbane and distanced voice.[8] But this relativism can also be seen more dramatically, as a series of prose gestures which set the terms of Forster's attempt to find a language for India.

The first paragraph begins like a parody of a guidebook, claiming to introduce the visitor to the outstanding features of Chandrapore.[9] It is quickly apparent that the town evades and even rebukes introduction in ordinary Western terms, for the narrator continually tells us what is absent, and what cannot be seen. His casual debunking inverts and pokes fun at inflated guidebook rhetoric: "the Ganges happens not to be holy here"; "the streets are mean, the temples ineffective"; "the zest for decoration stopped in the eighteenth century." At the end of the paragraph distinctions between one object and another are abandoned, and the description collapses buildings and inhabitants into a single, monotonous, mud-like blur, notable only for its persistence, "like some low but indestructable form of life" (7). The sentences seem to give up description in despair, as though the narrator himself had been overwhelmed by the failure of all human attempts to provide form through art, history, religion—or explanatory narrative.

[8] Alan Wilde, "Depths and Surfaces: Dimensions of Forsterian Irony," *English Literature in Transition*, 16 (1973), 262 and 266. Wilde's argument that the narrator qualifies and destroys any possibility of stable value does not take the romantic part of the narration into account.

[9] Frank Kermode notes the guidebook quality, but sees it as an unselfconscious part of the narrative ease. "The One Orderly Product," in *Puzzles and Epiphanies: Essays and Reviews 1958-1961* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 79-85. Kermode's superb reading of the opening sentences asserts the unity of syntactical structure with the novel's larger argument, in accordance with his view of Forster's near-Symbolist belief in the value of artistic order.

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So the guidebook voice modulates into a levelling evocation of a primordial, larger-than-human time-scale. It is succeeded, in the second paragraph, by the possibility of a conventionally romantic response. From the rise, Chandrapore is an exotic "view." In a few deft sentences, Forster parodies the deadened formulations of the British colonial romance:

> It is a city of gardens. It is no city but a forest sparsely scattered with huts. It is a tropical pleasaunce washed by a noble river. The toddy palms and neem trees . . . rise from the gardens where ancient tanks nourish them, they burst out of stifling purlieus and unconsidered temples. Seeking light and air, and endowed with more strength than man or his works, they soar above the lower deposit to greet one another with branches and beckoning leaves, and to build a city for the birds. Especially after the rains do they screen what passes below . . . .(8)

It is clear enough that these bursting, soaring, endowed trees are romantic blinders, screening the view of the shapeless mass below. The criticism implicit in this self-consciously mannered style is strengthened by its association with the red-brick civil station. On the rise itself, life is defined functionally—grocer's, bungalow, cemetery—and laid out along right-angled roads. Thus the romantic sensibility and the utilitarian are linked, as they were historically, and the gushy romantic diction is connected with self-protective European notions of technical progress and civilization. The tone taken toward that diction shows Forster's distance from his earlier English-suburban novels; a simple dichotomy between red-brick culture and romance no longer holds.

But what is to take its place? "The sky settles everything," says the narrator (9), and many critics agree, symbolically associating the sky with Forster's distanced and distancing perspectives.[10] Stylistically, the description in the final paragraphs seems an attempt to transcend the inadequate formulations of guide-book talk and conventional romantic images, in a voice without expectation, value, or judgment. The narrator becomes a metaphysician of light, mixing careful naturalistic observation of the changes in the sky with mystical religious suggestion: "a dome of blending tints"; "the stars hang like lamps from the immense vault." Straining at grammar, he sounds momen-

[10] See Stone, p. 317; Wilde, p. 261; and Jo M. Turk, "The Evolution of Forster's Narrator," *Studies in the Novel*, 5 (1973), 432.

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tarily like Wallace Stevens trying to write his way out of the other side of a romantic cosmos: "that farther distance, though beyond colour, last freed itself from blue." These activities of light, romantically endowed and soaring in their own way, are the substance of Forster's new romantic rhetoric. More abstract and apparently inhuman than the plaintive and projective romanticism in the earlier paragraph, the description of light offers a realm of metaphor which exists throughout the novel in tension with more traditional romantic responses.

In addition to the romance of light, Forster invents a style of describing landscape in primitive terms. The final paragraph of the opening chapter makes the sky into a powerful god-figure, conjured up in almost child-like sentences: "But when the sky chooses, glory can rain into the Chandrapore bazaars or a benediction can pass from horizon to horizon. The sky can do this because it is so strong and so enormous." A stark but highly sexual relationship between sky and "prostrate" earth emerges from the sparely made narrative assertions: "No mountains infringe on the curve. League after league the earth lies flat, heaves a little, is flat again." The power of this voice, quite new in Forster's range, seems to be released by the absence of humans; there is no "infringement" upon the intimate relations of sky and earth.

With the invention of such rhetoric, Forster ostensibly frees himself from the problems inherent in human encounters with nature, dissolving the romantic yearning for unity into relationships between natural objects. Yet this version of the Indian landscape finally frees a voice capable of creating, without defensive irony, a truly romantic space. Thus the opening chapter establishes a tension between two kinds of romanticism: the conventional expectations of the British sight-seers and the narrator's mythical, a-human description.

It is important to note that most of the chapter—like the famous description of the caves in chapter 12—was written in 1913, long before Forster's second visit to India provoked the shock of disparity between the landscape and what he had written.[11] Nonetheless the chapters remained, in prominent positions, like pillars of narrative through which we pass into the landscape of India. Moreover, the tension between Forster's desire for beautifully shaped prose and his distrust of language

[11] See the chronology of composition suggested by Oliver Stallybrass in *Aspects of E. M. Forster* (1969), rpt. in *A Passage to India*, ed. Bradbury, pp. 36-37.

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continues in the story itself, taking the form of an implicit opposition between human talk and silent light—a division that embodies the gap between experience and retrospective art which so haunted Forster as he wrote *A Passage to India.*

Throughout the " Mosque " section, we hear human voices sounding helplessly against an immense universe of silent light or disturbed darkness. When the romance-hunting sight-seers watch the moon in the Ganges, the narrative splits between a visionary description of light and the responses of Ronny, Adela, and Mrs. Moore. The descriptive language creates a separate romantic and even pastoral cosmos of light: " Below them a radiance had suddenly appeared. It belonged neither to water nor moonlight but stood like a luminous sheaf upon the fields of darkness . . . soon the bright sheaf would be gone, and a circlet, itself to alter, be burnished upon the streaming void. . ." (32). The emphasis on " alteration " is typical of the way Forster denies the existence of a static romantic realm elsewhere. Still, the prose creates such a realm; against its intense abstraction we are forced to experience the explanatory and exclamatory human voices as intrusions which break the universal silence into " patches of unquietness " (32).

This juxtaposition of voice and light occurs again in the description of the Bridge Party. After Ronny speaks there is a silence, and the words of the ladies " seemed to die as soon as uttered. . . . [T]he sky, not deeply coloured but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference " (39). Forster's sense of his own language wilted and gone dead comes through here, but it is placed beside a powerful rhetoric which creates that active silence of light. And, against the pressure of the language of light, Forster portrays with a special brilliance and pleasure the comic, helpless necessity of human dialogue.

The silence after Godbole's song at the tea party is a high point in the drama of voices and silence. But the idea that human voices are interruptions of an essential silence is further intensified by effects which disconnect voices from their speakers. Forster plays with this notion when he gives a line of dialogue to " a pleasant voice. . . . Neither of them knew the speaker nor did they ever see him again. He passed with his friendly word through red-brick pillars into the darkness " (24-25). Mrs. Moore's own voice, as she sympathizes with the wasp, becomes disconnected: not waking the wasp, it " floated out, to swell the night's uneasiness " (35). Voices separate from their sources and miss their destinations, turning into potentially sinister energy.

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The disturbed energy of talk set loose from both its human sources and the objects it attempts to name is most powerfully expressed in the echo metaphor. The echo, as Mrs. Moore and Adela experience it, is generally interpreted as a threat to rational Western thought and discriminations of value. But it is most resonant in terms of Forster's own dilemma; for, as it takes its place among the metaphors of language which are so insistently woven into the stories of Mrs. Moore and Adela, it also signifies a threat to the moral power of art.

Adela's story is told in a way that emphasizes the problem of naming. Her response to psychological confusion is to give names to things; her distaste for being labelled is a measure of her sense of the power of labels. Just after breaking off her engagement with Ronny, puzzled by the feelings escaping around the edges of their rationality, she asks Ronny to name a bird in the tree above them. To identify it "would somehow have solaced their hearts" (85). But, the narrator goes on, "nothing in India is identifiable; the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else" (86). The sense of failure that Ronny and Adela feel about their relationship is transferred to their dejection in the face of the unidentifiable in Indian nature, and the scene establishes the landscape as a force that frustrates Adela's need to control experience by naming it. The theme is expanded in the episode of the auto breakdown on the Marabar Road; there, the narrator calls the source of the accident "some external force" which is not "legible" in the confusion of tracks in the road (89). But Adela persists in finding a name for the unknown, settling finally on "hyena," while the Indians, and later Mrs. Moore, know in some less articulated way that the force was a "ghost," generated by left-over confusions of feeling between people. These episodes, repeated and escalated, reach their crisis when Adela names Aziz as the source of her panic in the cave.

The notion that objects in India actively evade the words that signify them resonates through the description of the elephant ride to the Marabar Caves. The prose itself demonstrates the tension between logical exposition and experiences which slip away from it: "... a new quality occurred, a spiritual silence which invaded more senses than the ear. Life went on as usual, but had no consequences, that is to say, sound did not echo or thoughts develop. Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion. For instance, there were some mounds by the edge of the track..." (140). The desire to explain lurks in the phrases—"therefore," "that is to say"—and the

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instances that follow suggest that the sense of "illusion" comes from the way words will not stick to the landscape. The villagers say that the low mounds are both graves and breasts of the goddess Parvati. Adela names an object she sees as a snake, but finds, looking through field-glasses, that it is a twisted tree-stump.[12] The word persists despite her correction, the villagers refusing to abandon it. So "the word" turns into illusion, and the odd phrase "everything seemed cut off at its root" refers to the eerie disconnection between language and the unexplainable, sourceless, rootless presence of objects in nature. The passage recalls Furbank's account of Forster's response to the landscape: "there was nothing to describe, no reason for the position of anything."[13]

The snake incident anticipates the form of Adela's mistake in the caves, and introduces the field-glasses as symbols in the pattern of opposition between direct and artfully shaped experience. When Adela sees the object, she leaps to a sinister and sexually charged conclusion. With the help of the glasses, which frame and clarify the far-off object, she sees correctly, although she cannot stop the effect of the spoken word any more than she can stop the social machinery which takes over when she names Aziz.

What happens to Adela in the cave is that she loses her field-glasses: "She had struck the polished wall—for no reason—and before the comment had died away, he followed her, and the climax was the falling of the field-glasses" (104). That is the phrasing of one of Adela's attempts to narrate and explain the incident to herself, and a symbolically accurate one. The climax of her story is a loss of vision, of the corrective and shaping tool of distance which has enabled her to live the life of "the logical girl" (31). The unreasonable act of striking the wall of the cave releases the echo, which becomes a figure for the fearful power of feeling gone out of control. It "had spouted after her when she escaped, and was going on still like a river that gradually floods the plain.... Evil was loose" (194).

The linkage of "evil" with the formless, aggressive power of disconnected sound is crucial in assessing the moral status of artistic vision in Forster's view. Adela's echo is later mitigated for a moment when she pronounces Aziz's name, which has become unmentionable in the

[12] Both this scene and the automobile breakdown episode are based on personal experiences which Forster records in *The Hill of Devi*, pp. 92-93 and 133-134. Both are re-shaped to emphasize Adela's obsession with identification.

[13] Furbank, p. 226.

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British community, made "synonymous with the power of evil" (202). The simple act of naming Aziz without accusation recreates the possibility of beauty and form in sound: "the sound of it now rang out like the first note of a new symphony" (202). The relief in that moment is both aesthetic and moral; and the "note" prefigures Adela's retraction of her mistake at the trial, an act which is also linked, as I suggested earlier, with the formed beauty of romantic vision.

During her testimony, Adela regains the distance she had lost in the caves. Her field-glasses are, in a sense, restored; the distance created by time, memory, and imagination allows her to see the day at Marabar as though she were there, but at a great remove. This "double relation" makes it possible to shape the experience into something of "indescribable splendour," a response unavailable during the original experience. At the same time, Adela is released from the pressure of voices in the courtroom; seeming to speak from "across a sort of darkness" to Mr. McBryde, she becomes "the voice in the distance" (227-28). Set apart from human talk, and located on the visual side of the novel's split territory, she tells the truth.

In all these incidents, the artful vision is the *right* one, the one which contains or excludes uncontrollable sexuality or "evil." Against the lesson of chaos which India teaches the romance-seeking visitors, the scenes manifest a strong desire to cry out "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"; to reassert not only the aesthetic but the moral necessity for artistic form in the face of the shapelessness of inner or outer experience.

At the same time, the trial scene casts a skeptical eye at the suppressions which sustain the poetic response. Adela's vision seems to occur as a shield against the fear that her "private failure" (227) to love Ronny should emerge as the real truth of the trial. The presences of the punkah wallah and the spirit of Mrs. Moore have often been associated with Adela's mood, but Forster's psychology is more canny than mystical. It is Adela's own romantic trance that "protected her, like magnificent armor" (227). The splendour of the vision distorts and covers the actual failure of imaginative response on the day of the expedition, and the sense of personal despair which lay behind it. It is as though the scene asked us to see that art is a benevolent and necessary lie which we tell ourselves in the face of our ungovernable feelings, and our inability to find meaning and beauty in experience. For Adela the visionary moment of self-transcendance simply leaves the chaotic self behind. She does not come to terms with the feelings

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released in the cave, but seals them up again, presumably for a lifetime. After the trial she feels "emptied, valueless" (232); the moment of creation leaves nothing in its wake.

Adela's avoidance of the personal issue underlies the intensity of her romantic vision; the connection is another of Forster's ways to cast doubt upon the relationship of vision and experience. Yet Adela's story asserts the mind's need for the shape of vision, showing how inevitably she reverts to the forms offered by her own culture. Faced with the Indian landscape, the Western mind recoils. In retrospect, it cannot help but create an experience that never existed. Moreover, as Forster emphasizes when he extends the argument to Cyril Fielding's story, "the beauty of form" can generate renewals of life and feeling in the European heart. In the short essay-like chapter that concludes the "Caves" section, Fielding's response to Venice is recorded with a full sense of the relief and moral security he feels in the formal beauty of the Venetian architecture. Like his creator, Fielding drinks of this "cup of beauty...with a sense of disloyalty" (282) to his Indian commitment. Yet he embraces the precious gift, "the harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them," (282) without ironic qualification, and moves on to find a romantic-pastoral rebirth of tender feeling among "the buttercups and daisies of June" (282). The inability to create or respond to the beauty of form is, finally, defined as a road to death; that is Mrs. Moore's path.

Mrs. Moore's story is insistently told as the tale of a loss of faith in the power of language. Her blend of Christianity and sympathetic mysticism has often been discussed in religious and moral terms. But the quality of her despair is stated as a growing disgust at the helplessness of speech in the face of human experience—of love, or, in her own case, of death. This process begins quite early in the novel, when she feels a need to hold on to the "name" of God: "She needs must pronounce his name frequently, as the greatest she knew, yet she had never felt it less efficacious" (52). Her first response to her moment in the cave is to be unable to write a letter to her children, and the passage which goes on to record her mood is about the reduction of even the most noble or beautiful human speech to monosyllabic sound. The failure of religion is a failure of language: "poor little talkative Christianity." And at the end of the passage Mrs. Moore disowns even her own best words; "the affectionate and sincere words that she had spoken to [Aziz] seemed no longer hers but the air's" (150).

This formulation, the rhetorical climax of Mrs. Moore's disillusion-

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ment, links her story with the echo concept, though the metaphor is stressed differently than in Adela's case. Like an echo, and like those other dissociated voices in the novel, Mrs. Moore's words to Aziz do not remain a part of her; once released, they are simply disturbances in the motion of air. As we learn in her first mosque scene with Aziz, Mrs. Moore is talented at the conversation which makes harmonious social connections; now she recognizes that she cannot claim her own language as evidence of her moral being. Her refusal to speak on Aziz's behalf is an expression of that recognition, and of the attendant disgust. Her later speeches to Adela and Ronny, fragmented and inconclusive, dramatize the literal breakdown of her belief in the moral efficacy of language.

Forster does not allow us to rest in Mrs. Moore's response any more fully than in any other vision; its finality is denied by the description of her homeward journey. But, unlike Adela, Mrs. Moore does not regain her sense that words or things signify. She does pass beyond language and form, in the only way that human beings can; her death alone prevents any rejuvenating vision.

Forster's attempt to explain what had happened to Mrs. Moore links her situation quite directly with his own artistic one:

> If this world is not to our taste, well, at all events there is Heaven, Hell, Annihilation—one or other of those large things, that huge scenic background of stars, fire, blue or black air. All heroic endeavour, and all that is known as art, assumes that there is such a background. . . . But in the twilight of the double vision, a spiritual muddledom is set up for which no high-sounding words can be found . . . .(207-208)

The little meditation shows Forster's hand, in all its shakiness. The huge scenic background is indeed assumed in the art of *A Passage to India*, but this way of putting it, suggestive of operatic stage backdrops, shows that Forster cannot say whether the background is significant nature, or human fabrication. Are those stars, fire, coloured air, only modern substitutes for the high-sounding inventions of traditional religion? Forster's predicament, much like Conrad's, is that the background of "large things" is essential to his vision of art, yet it continually slides away from the human meanings which try to cast it into formal importance. As the meditation on Mrs. Moore goes on to reveal, the need for "large things" exists in the face of a deep fear that only pettiness inhabits the abyss; the twilight of the double vision

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is a "state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time" (207). The passage could be a gloss of *Heart of Darkness*, with a difference; for its insistence that art depends on assuming the reality of the background retreats more easily to a pre-modern position than do Conrad's persistent, sustained ambiguities.

Forster's own romantic sensibility is most clearly apparent in the novel's descriptive centerpiece, an account of the caves which is remarkably different in tone and content from the experiences attributed to Mrs. Moore and Adela. This point needs stressing, for it is easy to make the caves into fairly consistent symbols of a pre-human condition of valuelessness or nothingness, and the narrative does emphasize the "unspeakable" quality of the hills and the difficulty of attaching human speech to the phenomenon. But the tone of these statements is reverent, even sentimental: "Nothing, nothing, attaches to them, and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend upon human speech" (124). "Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing, would be added to the sum of good and evil" (125). For this speaker, nothingness is "internal perfection" (124); a world wonderfully free from human muddle. As in the opening chapter, it is precisely this freedom, the constant assertion of the non-human, which underlies and makes possible the intense romantic yearning in the description of the caves.

The opening paragraphs of the chapter rely on images of vast geological change in order to send the imagination back, past even "the immemorial," to a time before time, when earth and sun—the lovers of chapter one—were united. The hills, "flesh of the sun's flesh," release in the narrator a yearning for primal unity, for a time "before our globe was torn from his bosom." The hills are also, perhaps regretfully, seen as altering, subject to the slow movement of river and earth. But they remain "outposts," likened to war heroes who might "stand, knee-deep, throat-deep, in the advancing soil." In this geological mythology, the hills become remnants of paradisal creation, reminders of a source and a time before "everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion" (140). Eden may be suggested in images of astronomy, but it is, unmistakably, Eden, its human relationships transposed into pseudo-scientific terms. The image of those "outposts," standing against the flow of mud and slime is formally analogous to the image of Howards End, holding onto its pastoral values while London's slabs of mud sprawl slowly into the

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surrounding country; and it represents a similarly nostalgic frame of mind.

The description of the visitor's experience in the caves is probably Forster's nearest approach to successful lyric poetry.[14] The narrator achieves what even Godbole later fails to imagine, a vision of the life of stone. Mrs. Moore and Adela find the caves to be reflected sound; the narrator's vision depends, appropriately, upon reflected light. "The visitor" provides only an eye and an apparently soundless match:

> Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock, and moves toward the surface like an imprisoned spirit: the walls of the circular chamber have been most marvellously polished. The two flames approach and strive to unite but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid with lovely colours divides the lovers, delicate stars of pink and grey interpose, exquisite nebulae, shadings fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon, all the evanescent life of the granite, only here visible. Fists and fingers thrust above the advancing soil—here at last is their skin, finer than any covering acquired by the animals, smoother than windless water, more voluptuous than love. The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire. The cave is dark again, like all the caves. (125)

Rhetorically, this is a formed and satisfying vision of unity. The vision merges sky and stone, inside and outside, human and inhuman; with a striving toward unity, it ends with a muted sexual climax and closure. The lighted match does what the sunrise at Marabar was expected to do. Romantic experience is thus not denied, but merely displaced, from natural and conventional forms like sunrise to man-made moments of illumination.

Of this vision, Malcolm Bradbury writes, "The Platonic romantic gesture of the match in the cave is the dominating ambiguity of the book. Does it see *itself* in the polished wall of stone, or is the glimmer of radiance a promise?"[15] These symbolic alternatives themselves betray a critical position stuck in romantic terms. The moment is not a gesture from nature; it is, after all, dependent on the presence of an observer and recorder. Forster's description, like Adela's on trial,

[14] Stone quotes the entire sequence, to show how it contains all the symbols in the novel (pp. 304-306), before going on to see the caves as symbols of womb, tomb, and the unconscious, pre-rational condition (pp. 306-311).

[15] Bradbury, "Two Passages to India," p. 242.

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is an act of poetic recollection, a lyric memory of an unknown experience. Its presence attests to his desire for romantic form, achieved momentarily in words, and it has neither conclusion nor promise, except "The cave is dark again, like all the caves." Ultimately Forster cannot help but let his experience rest in satisfying shapes; the Western mind reverts helplessly to the relief of the romantic response. For all its modernist nullity, for all its loss of faith in the way language may touch experience, *A Passage to India* never fully finds its passage out of romantic rhetoric. The romance of light, the projection of human desire into sun, sky, and stone; these are of a piece with Adela's vision at the trial, and with the renewal that Fielding experiences when he returns to Western forms of art and landscape.

To assert that the novel remains pulled between retrospective romanticism and a denial of its validity may seem to ignore its final section. "Temple" is assumed to be a kind of Hindu answer—more or less ambiguous or satisfactory, according to the reader—to Mrs. Moore's vision of nullity, and to the failures of friendship dramatized in "Caves." Formally, the section is a tribute to the power of chance, against the demonstrated collapse of unity by invitation. Godbole's vision during the Mau festival is a disciplined response to chance images, and the reuniting of Aziz with Fielding and Mrs. Moore's children occurs through the chaotic and non-verbal collision of boats. So many of the novel's images are interwoven in newly positive ways that the section seems to draw the whole novel together. Yet there is something too well woven about the recurrence of images; "Temple" comes to seem more a coda than a conclusion. Forster's own sense that the novel was a failure may rest on the contrivance of the section, for, while he spoke of it as the shape that was needed, he did not think it succeeded in balancing the weight of the other sections.[16]

Insofar as the narrative addresses the questions about art and romantic memory that it raises earlier, it does so through rather direct commentary about Godbole's vision and the Mau festival. Godbole's vision—really an act of memory—can be more interestingly compared with Adela's visionary memory at the trial than with Mrs. Moore's despair. As Godbole remembers Mrs. Moore, "Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny

[16] In the *Paris Review* interview (p. 27), Forster said of the "Temple" section, "It is well placed; and it gathers up some strings. But there ought to be more after it. The lump sticks out a little too much."

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splinter, and he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness may be found. Completeness, not reconstruction" (286). The moral of this episode lies in Godbole's attempt to imitate God by loving all things equally; so it takes its place in the novel's critique of Western categorizing and discriminations of value. But Forster is also trying to represent the purity of Godbole's memory process. It is not clear, probably even to Forster himself, what "the place where completeness may be found" is, but what it is not has importance. "Completeness, not reconstruction" surely refers to Forster's (and Adela's) reconstructed romantic memories; the phrase asks us to imagine that Godbole is capable of direct memory, without distortions of distance or the need for deliberate shaping. But Forster cannot imagine the process consistently. Godbole is said not to "select" Mrs. Moore, yet he "impels" her, from among the throng of images. In fact the relationship between Godbole's mind and the images in his memory comes to look suspiciously like the reciprocal activity between mind and image that we see in Adela's vision. Forster values Godbole's mind because it does provide selective spiritual pressure; and "completeness," seems to mean a better, undistanced, version of reconstruction. Godbole is a figure for a dream of art without distortion or fiction, a reconciliation of the poles of Forster's own division.[17]

The merriment and ease of parts of the narration in the festival sections has also prompted the view that the narrator participates in the act of celebrating throngs of images, in Hindu style. Wilfred Stone sees the passage as a transcendance of Forster's earlier art, an achievement of prophecy combined with humor.[18] This view is more true to the idea of the section than to its narrative presentation, which rarely leaves the point of view of a questioning, judging Western mind. Often the section reads like an argument rather than a description. For instance, "... they did not one thing which the non-Hindu would feel dramatically correct; this approaching triumph of India was a muddle (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form" (285). The argument is the one Forster has been having with himself throughout the novel, and it does not change significantly here. The trouble with even this version of India is that it is antithetical to art.[19]

[17] To identify Godbole as "the human counterpart of the Forsterian voice," as McConkey does (p. 86), seems too easy a view of Forster's narrative stance.

[18] Stone, p. 303.

[19] Forster's letters about the Gokul Ashtami festival in *The Hill of Devi* (pp. 151-182) express both his fascination and his strong reservations about the bad taste and fatuousness of the ceremonies.

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Implicitly comparing the festival to the gestures of Western romantic thought, Forster writes in self-reflective puzzlement, "But the human spirit had tried by a desparate contortion to ravish the unknown, flinging down science and history in the struggle, yes, beauty herself. Did it succeed? Books written afterwards say 'Yes.' But how, if there is such an event, can it be remembered afterwards? How can it be expressed in anything but itself?" For, as soon as it is thought about, "it becomes history and falls under the rules of time" (288). The status of the festival in Forster's imagination comes through in the comparison: he seems to think of it as an "unreconstructed" substitute for romantic experience. But it is discomforting; it challenges the authenticity of his own "book written afterwards," throwing the whole artistic enterprise into doubt. Once again the validity of language and memory surfaces as the crucial issue—what can be expressed afterwards?—and there is no answer. Though the description of the festival succeeds in creating an energetic mixture of human and inhuman forces, ultimately the festival, like the Indian landscape, throws up a frustrating resistance to beauty and to art. The issue persists, unresolved.

For all its apparent formal unity, *A Passage to India* remains painfully split between Forster's desire to rescue romantic discourse from convention and banality, and his knowledge that the evocation of "the huge scenic background" may well be simply a helpless and necessary fraud of the human mind. It is a spectrum in which a writer might play, as Wallace Stevens does; Forster is not at play, but in doubt. His distrust of the process of recollection and recreation in art coexists uncomfortably with his depiction of the mind's moral need for artistic order; his seemingly inhuman visions of landscape are saturated with personal romantic yearning. Metaphors of language are so constantly present in the narrative as to be obsessive; the novel even ends, inconsistently, with a speech made by the sky. A part of Forster's decision to abandon novel-writing after *A Passage to India* might well lie in the depths of these artistic contradictions.

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NATHANIEL MACKEY •

Limbo, Dislocation, Phantom Limb: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Occasion

> "... in a context such as the Caribbean and the Americas ... the life of situation and person has an inarticulacy one must genuinely suffer with and experience if one is to acquire the capacity for a new relationship and understanding."
>
> —*Wilson Harris*

> "She succeeded in getting rid of the scaffolding of the song, to make way for a furious and fiery *duende*, companion of sandladen winds, that made those who were listening tear their clothes rhythmically, like Caribbean Negroes clustered before the image of St. Barbara."
>
> —*Federico García Lorca*

1

To go back to Lorca's "Theory and Function of the *Duende*" perhaps offers a usable route into what Wilson Harris is up to. Lorca, in his now famous essay, suggests that "the *duende* is a power and not a behaviour, ... a struggle and not a concept" and that "every step that a man ... takes toward the tower of his perfection is at the cost of the struggle he maintains with a *duende*." He goes on to offer the example of Pastora Pavón, *La Niña de los Peines*, an Andalusian flamenco singer. One night while singing in a tavern in Cádiz, *La Niña*, disturbed by the audience's indifference to her technical brilliance, is forced to abandon virtuosity, to sing, as Lorca puts it, "without voice":

> *La Niña de los Peines* had to tear her voice, because she knew that she was being listened to by an *élite* not asking for forms but for the marrow of forms, for music exalted into purest essence. She had to impoverish her skills and aids; that is, she had to drive away her muse and remain alone so that the *duende* might come and join in a hand-to-hand fight. And how she sang! Now she was in earnest, her voice was a

• Nathaniel Mackey is an Assistant Professor with the Board of Studies in Literature at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

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> jet of blood, admirable because of its sincerity, and it opened like a ten-fingered hand in the nailed but tempestuous feet of a Christ by Juan de Juni.[1]

The *duende* is both an omen and a goad. It insists upon the insufficiency, the essential silence of mere technical eloquence, stretching the singer's voice to the breaking-point. This pursuit of a meta-voice, of an acknowledged and thus more authentic "silence" beyond where conventional elocution leaves off, this impoverishment or tearing of the voice, corresponds to what Harris, quoting the Barbadian poet Edward Brathwaite, refers to as "tunelessness," the essential condition of the Caribbean's "orchestra of deprivation." Some such numinous embrace as that of *La Niña* by the muse of dispossession, by the realization of one's having been heretofore silenced by presumptions of mastery, standards or canons of control, is what is repeatedly invoked throughout Harris' work: "The creative human consolation—if one dwells upon it meaningfully today—lies in the search for a kind of inward dialogue and space when one is deprived of a ready conversational tongue and hackneyed comfortable approach."[2] To embark upon this "inward dialogue" is to abandon one's conventional tongue, and this abandonment provides the occasion for, in Lorca's words, "the constant baptism of newly created things," or what Harris calls "the Well of Silence" (*ES*, 95).

The term *duende*, as the inclusion of Lorca's essay in Donald Allen's and Warren Tallman's *The Poetics of the New American Poetry* indicates, has made a place for itself in the vocabularies of many of the United States' more explorative poets. The relevance of the idea of *duende* to these poets' Adamic intentions becomes pretty obvious

[1] "Theory and Function of the *Duende*," *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, eds. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 91-103.

[2] *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Publications, 1967), p. 33. Subsequently referred to as *TWS* in the text of the essay. References to other Harris books will be abbreviated as follows: *PP=Palace of the Peacock* (London: Faber, 1960), *WA=The Whole Armour* (London: Faber, 1962), *SL=The Secret Ladder* (London: Faber, 1963), *ES=The Eye of the Scarecrow* (London: Faber, 1965), *WR=The Waiting Room* (London: Faber, 1967), *SR=The Sleepers of Roraima* (London: Faber, 1970), *AO=Ascent to Omina* (London: Faber, 1970), *AR=The Age of the Rainmakers* (London: Faber, 1971) and *CDN=Companions of the Day and Night* (London: Faber, 1975).

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in light of Lorca's assertion that "the appearance of the *duende* always presupposes a radical change of all forms based on old structures," that "it gives a sensation of freshness wholly unknown, having the quality of a newly created rose...." The term can thus serve to bring to bear upon Harris' work the notion of place as a persistent muse among American writers (by "American" I refer to both North and South America, not merely the United States), more specifically the notion of the Americas as a New World, at odds with traditional structures, conventions and forms. In the Americas more than anywhere else, that is, the occasion of place has provided the pretext for a poetics. This has been true primarily of those writers espousing or in search of an *open* poetics, the American condition being celebrated as one of marginality and unsettledness. Wilderness, whether that of the frontier West in the United States and Canada or that of the tropical bush in Central and South America, has served as a symbol of and inspiration for yet to be discovered poetic practices, for a break with established procedures and forms. What is meant by place in American poetics is most often the quality of having not yet been wholly domesticated or mapped. (Lorca: "To help us seek the *duende* there is neither map nor discipline.") Robert Kelly, for example, has written: "What sustains us/is the empty landscape/the land we have not touched,/the primal temple." [3]

Wilson Harris, who worked for several years as a government surveyor in the heartland bush of his native Guyana, has very much concerned himself with what I'm calling the Caribbean occasion, the impact of place, of a typically American "yet-to-be-inhabited-ness," upon consciousness and the arts in the Carribbean. In his essay "The Question of Form and Realism in the West Indian Artist" he stresses the openness or emptiness of the Caribbean landscape, a bareness he views as conducive to "an original conception of values":

> What is the position that the West Indian artist occupies? He lives in a comparatively bare world—mountains, jungles, rivers—where the monumental architecture of the old world is the exception rather than the rule... the very bareness of the West Indian world reveals the necessity to examine closely the starting point of human societies. The diminution of man is not entirely accomplished and a relationship between man

[3] Robert Kelly, *Flesh Dream Book* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), p. 132.

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> and the paradoxes of his world becomes evident as a relationship which can still have momentous consequences. (*TWS*, 13-14)

Harris' approach is explorative, prospective, even hopeful—"the diminution of man is not entirely accomplished"—and invests in the Caribbean's scarcity of what he sees are dubious attainments after all, the inhibiting structures which characterize a more settled, more conventional world. The bareness of an environment which is unencumbered by such structures, of "the land we have not touched," is embraced as though it were a blessing, the birthing ground for "the revelation of original and authentic rhythms." The hinterland or bush for this reason plays a prominent part in virtually all of Harris' novels, confronting his protagonists with enabling perils whereby their diminished, conventional consciousnesses are enlarged:

> Fenwick found himself at a nightmare loss for words. He was often repelled and fascinated by his camp attendant's calculating and yet spontaneous industry. It evoked in him a sensation of curious and abnormal helplessness as if a great distance stood between himself now and the faithful amenities of every past and truly harmonious domestic world, whatever loyal contrivances he had managed to establish. The jungle remained an eternal primitive condition. Everything and everyone could become threatening, even strangely privileged and demanding. (*SL*, 26)

The disorientation given rise to by the terrain can become the occasion for an immaterial transcendence or transformation as well. Fenwick, Harris writes, "liked to think of all the rivers of Guiana as the curious rungs in a ladder on which one sets one's musing foot again and again, to climb into both the past and the future of the continent of mystery" (*SL*, 19-20).

Place, as the foregoing indicates, corresponds to or is made to be suggestive of states of mind in Harris' works. The "monumental architecture" occupying the old world landscape accordingly makes that landscape representative of rigid, ingrained habits of thought. C. L. R. James has commented on Harris' work in the context of the deconstruction of these habits of thought undertaken by three European philosophers in particular, Heidegger, Jaspers and Sartre, arguing that "Harris is to be seen as a writer of the post war period who is in the full philosophical tradition":

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> ... Heidegger, in my opinion, and Jaspers and Sartre, are aware that the European preoccupation or acceptance of the material basis of life, a fixed assumption— that has broken down. That is the significance of Heidegger, Jaspers and Sartre.... Harris is saying that in the Americas, in Central America and in the West Indies, that has never been. There has never been that fixed assumption of things, that belief in something that is many centuries old and solid. That is why he is saying what I interpret as the *dasein*, the "being there". I find it profoundly important and viable especially for people who live in these territories.[4]

To the extent that Harris, like these philosophers, sees any "fixed assumption of things" (and correspondingly, the "monumental architecture" by which it's symbolized) as an impediment to an open, authentic consciousness, architectural and technological bareness or "underdevelopment" makes for a positive symbol in Harris' conception of Caribbean prospects—that of an *opportune* deprivation or dispossession. In this context, then, such terms as *deprivation* and *dispossession* are subject to quotation marks. The possibility of fulfillment in the midst of presumed and even manifest deprivation is a recurrent insistence throughout Harris' works. It is his commitment to and exploration of this possibility which set him apart from the dominant view of the Caribbean situation (or predicament, as that dominant view is more likely to call it).

The problematics of the Caribbean situation have to do with a history of colonialist and, more recently, neo-colonialist exploiation. This history has resulted in the continuation of patterns of dependency established with the inception of the plantation system three centuries ago. Despite so-called independence the nations of the Carribbean find themselves dependent upon outside powers—the United States and the former colony-holding nations of Europe—for military "protection" as well as such essentials as food and manufactured goods. Their physical resources and economic institutions have been developed for and dominated by outsiders, and they suffer the adverse trade balances in which their export economies result. Dependency likewise manifests itself in the cultural realm, the area with which Harris is concerned. As David Lowenthal in *West Indian Societies* writes: "If Europe dominates West Indian political and economic life, in terms of culture the West Indies are also Old World appendages. No other

[4] *Wilson Harris: A Philosophical Approach* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Univ. of the West Indies, 1965), p. 15.

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ex-colonies are so convinced they are British or French or cling more keenly to their European heritage." [5] It has thus become customary to speak of the West Indies almost wholly in terms of cultural deprivation or cultural parasitism. In an essay called "The Unresolved Constitution" Harris cites two authors in particular who exemplify this tendency, Jamaican novelist and sociologist Orlando Patterson and Trinidadian novelist V. S. Naipaul, in whose writings a litany of words like "historylessness," "rootlessness" and "chaos" has to do with the presumed lack of cultural traditions native to the Caribbean.

Harris argues that such writers reveal their own dependencies or parasitisms by clinging to so simplistic an interpretation of Caribbean culture, that the standards by which they judge the West Indies void are hand-me-downs from Europe. Naipaul, who has argued that "a literature can grow only out of a strong framework of social convention" and that the Caribbean lacks any such indigenous framework, simply imitates, Harris suggests, the conventional English novel. Harris accuses him of mimicry and of insulating himself, by way of borrowed conventions, against the very condition—conventionlessness—about which he writes:

> The contemporary English Novel . . . possesses a coherent design based on a social evolution and contract or bridge of generations. That this is something native to a particular social landscape—that in fact it has never claimed to subsume world literature—far less the imagination of man—is something that arouses the deepest uneasiness in the educated colonial from the British West Indies who wants—above everything else—to escape from humiliating reality into a style akin to first-class citizenship at the heart of Empire. . . . [I]t seems to me that if a writer employs a "coherency" based on the English social model to describe a native world which he himself goes to great lengths to declare invalid and non-historic or parasitic and mimic he gains a commanding strength (which is nevertheless illusion) over the material he describes that may entertain or divert people who have, in fact, no real experience or perception of what he is talking about.[6]

Such an approach lacks *duende*. Which is to say that it forsakes the anguished ground in which a tradition true to the Caribbean must root

[5] *West Indian Societies* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 5.

[6] "The Unresolved Constitution," *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14, 1/2 (1968), 43-47. Subsequent quotations in section I of the essay are taken from this source unless otherwise noted.

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itself, what Harris means by a descent into voicelessness, a "confrontation in depth":

> The constitution of history as it affects the Caribbean and the Guianas is one which the creative writer is profoundly qualified to explore, I believe, provided he can suffer again through his work the ancestral torment of finding his tongue seized again as if he had become a dumb thing without voice or language: yet for this very reason knowing himself uniquely immersed and equipped to embrace the muse through an imaginative re-discovery of the past. As I write this I am struck by the archetypal correspondence with Rimbaud—the disordering (*dérèglement*) of the senses. It is easy enough to pronounce on "historylessness," oppression etc.—once one stands above it within an order of insulation—once one does not creatively descend into the disorder of it, suffer creatively the disorder of it: an escape route which may well prove the best of two worlds and permit a skillful short-circuiting of real crisis or confrontation in depth. The art in short not of alienation as it is popularly called but of insulation.

Throughout remarks like these Harris is adamant that the opportunities afforded by the Caribbean "void" or "incoherency"—opportunities for experimentation and possible innovation, for "the constant baptism of newly created things"—not be overlooked. The very predicament so often lamented or railed against he wants to embrace as the occasion for an Adamic "centreing process, an internal representation of alien, however forbidding, particulars rather than an external representation of familiar hopelessness, stalemate and feud." He calls for the creative rejection of what he insists are oversimplifications, of the pressures on the writer "to make national and political and social simplifications of experience" (*TWS*, 30). Such an oversimplification he takes Patterson's "historylessness" to be:

> ... what he is doing is to underscore "history" and point up to a "historylessness" within centuries of oppression. The danger of this—if danger it can be called—is that if inflated into a monolithic trumpet to wage war against philistinism and bankruptcy, it may react with poetic justice by bolstering up, through glaring oversimplification, the very philistinism it sets out to destroy—if in fact it does set out to destroy anything at all.... [T]he clown of history is not *without* history but in fact is pregnant with a native constitution—the "lost" ages of men.

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Thus: "If I were asked to give in four words... the direction in which I would like the West Indian novel to move, my reply would be towards *an act of memory*" (Harris' italics).

2

In the essay "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas"[7] Harris quotes Merleau-Ponty's assertion that the freedom of the artist or the philosopher "consists in appropriating a *de facto* situation by endowing it with a figurative meaning beyond its real one." One of the essay's recurrent contentions is that historians of the Caribbean, native and foreign alike, have failed to exercise any such freedom, "that a cleavage exists... between the historical convention in the Caribbean and Guianas and the arts of the imagination." The essay is thus an attempt to point to a possible closing of that gap, towards an art (as well as act) of memory: "I believe the possibility exists for us to become involved in perspectives of renascense which can bring into play a figurative meaning beyond an apparently real world or prison of history.... I believe a philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of the imagination." The essay embodies, methodologically, the point Harris wishes to make: that a native tradition of imaginative response to cultural dislocation or "historylessness" does in fact exist and that this tradition provides models and cues for the Caribbean artist. Harris' act of memory consists of reassessing the Caribbean past in such a way as to find precedent for "a profound art of compensation," a "view of art as an extraordinary drama of consciousness whose figurative meaning lies beyond its *de facto* historical climate." Certain features of the past, that is, are endowed as *figures* by a self-reflexive muse.

Harris brings his art of memory to bear upon specific aspects of the Caribbean's Amerindian and African cultural inheritances, vestiges of and variations upon certain ritual practices, historical anecdotes, symbols and myths. The figurativity of his approach is readily seen in his evocation of what he calls "a *limbo* gateway between Africa and the Caribbean." His highly resonant use of the term *limbo* has first of all to do with the West Indian dance in which the dancer maneuvers his or her way underneath a bar which is gradually lowered. The outspread, spiderlike sprawl of the limbo dancer's limbs relates the

[7] *Caribbean Quarterly*, 16 (1970), 1-32. Subsequent quotations in section 2 of the essay are taken from this source unless otherwise noted.

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dance to the Africa-derived Anancy tales. Having to do with the doings of Anancy, a cunning trickster-god in the form of a spider, these tales are widely known in the Caribbean, very much a part of the region's folklore. Harris also points out that limbo is said to have been born in the holds of the slave ships during the Middle Passage, brought into being by their extreme lack of space. This connection with the Middle Passage and thus with the idea of a liminal or in-between state enchances the play on limbo-as-purgatory Harris wants to be "born" in mind. Another pun, this one on the word *limb* which the term *limbo* contains, brings in the idea of the phantom limb related to amputation or, in this context, geographical and cultural (yet another pun) dislocation. Finally, the phantom limb comes to be associated with the "rowdy" bands Harris recalls from his youth in Georgetown, a form of guerrilla theatre in which "some of the performers danced on high stilts like elongated limbs while others performed spreadeagled on the ground." Thus a network of resonances and poetic associations yokes a cultivation of the unusually low (limbo) with a compensatory extension into unaccustomed height ("rowdy" stilts).

What Harris is attempting with this figurative act of memory—his own spectral or phantom re-membering of a dismembered past—is to free the Caribbean of a reductionist historiography which imprisons it in its deprivations. He is attempting to recall and bring to light a tradition of folkish cunning, of imaginative, Anancy-like response to those deprivations:

> It has taken us a couple of generations to begin—just begin—to perceive, in this phenomenon, an activation of subconscious and sleeping resources in the phantom limb of dis-membered slave and god. An activation which possesses a nucleus of great promise—of far-reaching new poetic synthesis.
>
> For *limbo* (one cannot emphasize this too much) is not the total recall of an African past since that African past in terms of tribal sovereignty or sovereignties was modified or traumatically eclipsed with the Middle Passage and within generations of change that followed. *Limbo* was rather the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures. For example the theme of the phantom limb—the re-assembly of dismembered man or god—possesses archetypal resonances that embrace Egyptian Osiris, the resurrected Christ and the many-armed deity of India.

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And further on:

> ... the *limbo* dance becomes the human gateway which dislocates (and therefore begins to free itself from) a uniform chain of miles across the Atlantic. This dislocation or interior space serves therefore as a corrective to a uniform cloak or documentary stasis of imperialism.... Once we perceive this inner corrective to historical documentary and protest literature which sees the West Indies as utterly deprived, or gutted by exploitation, we begin to participate the genuine possibilities of original change in a people severely disadvantaged (it is true) at a certain point in time.
>
> The *limbo* dance therefore implies, I believe, a profound art of compensation which seeks to re-play a dismemberment of tribes (*note again the high stilted legs of some of the performers and the spider-anancy masks of others running close to the ground*) and to invoke at the same time a curious psychic re-assembly of the parts of the dead god or gods. And that re-assembly which issued from a state of cramp to articulate a new growth—and to point to the necessity for a new kind of drama, novel and poem—is a creative phenomenon of the first importance in the imagination of a people violated by economic fates. (Harris' italics)

Harris goes on to relate limbo to *vodun*, the Haitian possession rites derived from West Africa. The point he stresses, quoting Pierre Verger and Harold Courlander on African *vodun* and Haitian *vodun* respectively, is that the latter lacks the former's orthodoxy, the insularity tribal custom and authority serve to maintain: "African *vodun* is a school of ancestors: it is very conservative. Something of this conservative focus remains very strongly in Haitian *vodun* but there is an absorption of new elements which breaks the tribal monolith of the past and re-assembles an intertribal or cross-cultural community of families." The insularity of the various African peoples brought to the New World—Ibo, Arada, Nago, Congo, etc.—was broken or dislocated by the Middle Passage. Harris views this breakage or amputation as fortunate, an opportune disinheritance or partial eclipse of tribal memory which called creative forces and imaginative freedoms into play. He relates the word *vodun* to the word *void*, to the emptiness or "historylessness" left by the collapse of tribal coherency and sanction, the dissolution of ancestral rule. Limbo and *vodun* are characterized by a phantom extension into the novel "inarticulacy" brought about by the Middle Passage, into imaginative reassemblings, resourceful acts of *bricolage*. Thoughout all of this Harris is making a case for

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the imagination: "... the apparent void of history which haunts the black man may never be compensated until an act of imagination opens gateways between civilizations, between technological and spiritual apprehensions, between racial possessions and dispossessions.... *Limbo* and *vodun* are variables of an underworld imagination—variables of phantom *limb* and *void* and a nucleus of stratagems in which *limb* is a legitimate pun on *limbo*, *void* on *vodun*."

Charles Olson, lecturing at Black Mountain College during the fifties in a course he called "The Special View of History," said of Yeats' *A Vision* by way of qualifying his own "special view":

> (The messengers who came to Yeats through his wife's voice as a medium, and through whose instructions he wrote the Vision—a spiritualistic Spenglerism of time—Yeats was honest enough to quote in these words, "We come to bring you images for your verse.") It may turn out in the end that this dogmatic system of mine is no more.[8]

Harris' "philosophy of history ... in the arts of the imagination," it should be clear by now, is likewise intimate with and committed to his own poetic work. Merleau-Ponty, in the passage Harris quotes, points out that "the act of the artist or philosopher is free, but not motiveless." The motive underlying Harris' figurative reconstruction of the Caribbean heritage is his need to find his own work *prefigured* in what he brings back from the past, to bring back images for—and of—his own poetic novels. For example, the phantom limb/Osirian phallus conceit of which he makes use in one of the passages quoted above can also be found in the novel *Ascent to Omai* (*AO*, 103-104). Other such overlaps between Harris' critical or theoretical writings and his novels abound. Harris' treatment of Odysseus' flight from Circe in the essay "The Writer and Society" (*TWS*, 52-54) is brought to mind in *The Waiting Room* by the recurrence of words and images pertaining to ships and sailing and to deafness and/or blindness. An example:

> The uncertainty of shape or direction—ancient vessel, model of creation, ark or covenant— ... acted like a hidden spur as well as naked pole, a dynamic and static concretion to which one surrendered oneself as to a "black" pilot, weathered masthead, phantom of flesh within but beyond the sound of flesh, echo of self-regard, song of the sirens.... One embraced and was held in turn

[8] *The Special View of History* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), pp. 35-36.

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> by this "deaf" mast to which one was truly bound and secured within the elements of distraction....(*WR*, 47)

(*TWS*, 52-54). That Harris' critical and theoretical writings are of a piece with his novels should come as no particular surprise though, especially in this day when poetry and fiction so often comment upon themselves. Nor should it come as a surprise that his exploration of the Amerindian legacy, like his exegesis of limbo and *vodun*, brings to light exactly such images and gestures as his own novels emulate and feed upon.

Harris looks in particular at the bush baby legends of the ancient Caribs, the cannibalistic aborigines after whom the region is named. Having conquered the Arawaks, the original inhabitants of the area, the Caribs themselves eventually fell victim to another wave of conquest, this one by the Spanish. The bush babies were wraiths, apparitions which rose out of the pots in which they cooked their Arawak victims. Harris argues that these wraiths "carried... overtones of eclipse at the hands of Spain..., overtones also of a new dawn":

> We know from investigations into the psychology of the *victim* (conducted, for example, in post-Hiroshima Japan) that it is he, the victim, very often, whose consciousness is infused with omens of the future (apocalyptic omens are often of this kind in a *victor/victim* syndrome). It is as though the guilt of the victor stands on the threshold of a creative breakthrough in the darkening consciousness of the victim as prelude to the birthpangs of a new cosmos. It is not inconsistent, therefore, that we may discern, in the rubble of the Carib past, signs akin to a new ominous but renascent consciousness at the time of the Spanish conquest.

The bush babies are the annunciation of and symbol for what he terms "the native or host consciousness," the dawning of a new consciousness in which conquest gives way to accommodation as the dominant model for human behavior and motivation:

> The overtones and undertones of host native—or a native consciousness—could have occupied little more than a latent threshold in the Carib/Latin world of the 16th century. For that was an age whose over-riding character—as in the centuries to follow—remained rooted in notions of conquest. What I would suggest, however, is that this over-riding character of conquest (the Caribs themselves were conquerors of the ancient West Indies before Spain, England, France, Holland came on the scene) was

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> in a state of subconscious erosion. And I also feel that this latent threshold—this inner erosion of a certain dominant mould or character of conquest—this inner secret of the native (inner divergence of the native from a consolidated given pattern which is the tyranny of history)—is fundamental to the originality of the Guianas and the Caribbean and to a renascence of sensibility.

Thus the bush baby syndrome further articulates the need for an imaginative "inner time," an "inner divergence" from the apparent hegemony of realist/materialist history in the Caribbean: "... the Carib or Carnival 'immortal child' was an inner omen which diverged from the immediate realism of the day. Such a divergence exposed latencies or sleeping resources. Those resources of inner divergence need to be converted in our age, I feel, into an original threshold in a West Indian architecture of consciousness."

In another essay dealing with Amerindian inheritance, "The Phenomenal Legacy," Harris is more explicit as to the connection between his own writing and the omens or imperatives he's been able to elicit from the Caribbean past. He insists that he is not formulating or seeking to impose upon anyone a pre-conceived theory or an aesthetic blueprint but that his insights and assertions come from the actual act of writing: "My approaches ... are not intellectual, but rather part of a hard and continuous wrestling within the medium of my own work, a process more akin to something active and unpredictable rather than planned and theoretical."[9] He points out as well that his involvement with the Amerindian past is an involvement "not with these aborigines as such, but with the aboriginal fact of conquest," and then goes on to insist on the need for an imaginative participation in the *brokenness* of the Amerindian legacy, for a vicarious or phantom penetration of an analogous broken state, "the necessity to enter a transformative area of assumptions beneath one's safe crust of bias":

> For the subject which is being approached exists in a void and therefore one needs to participate in it, I believe, with an art of fiction, an imaginative fluidity that is as close as one can possibly come to existing now, with immediacy, in a form that has already been broken in the past. It is here that one starts to concede, and enter upon those alternative realities ("phenomenal legacy") which may lead to a new scale or illumination of the meaning of

[9] "The Phenomenal Legacy," *The Literary Half-Yearly*, 11 (1970), 1-6. Subsequent quotations in section 2 of the essay are taken from this source unless otherwise noted.

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> "community". Such a willingness to participate imaginatively borders upon a confession of weakness, and this, therefore, paradoxically, supplies the creative wisdom or potential to draw upon strange reserves and perspectives one would otherwise overlook or reject, detached as we feel we are within an absolute tower of strength (false tower of strength).

This "confession of weakness," I'd like to suggest, is the artistic counterpart of the "erosion of conquest" of which Harris finds portents in the bush baby myths. What he is doing is insisting that the Caribbean artist descend into the consciousness of the conqueror-turned-conquered, into that shock-induced awareness of ephemerality (of what he calls "the mortality of all assumptions") and the consequent need for a new dawn which overcame the Caribs. The Caribbean artist should cultivate a similar apprehension of the provisionality of all structures and institutions, of the fact that no set of conventions, no "coherency" constitutes a final conquest of "the perennial, essentially human or natural fact of obscure, sometimes catastrophic change, life-in-death, death-in-life." One must vigilantly question, that is, the conquistador—the "safe crust of bias" or "false tower of strength"—within oneself.

Harris' two books of retellings of Amerindian myths, *The Sleepers of Roraima* and *The Age of the Rainmakers*, can be taken to be exemplary of the approach he argues for. That he is not encouraging acts of protest on behalf of the vanquished is made evident by such passages as: "Hunter and hunted. Could they be one and the same in the end?" (*SR*, 24), or "the conquistador pass had changed hands frequently" (*AR*, 26). The concern is instead with unity or unification, with "gateway conceptions of community" (*AR*, 61) and "a conception of the native as a curious host of consciousness" (*AR*, 38). The divergence of Harris' treatment of the aborigine from the more familiar romantic and/or protest treatments is indicated by his highly idiosyncratic, highly specialized use of the term *native*. In the tale of the bush baby Yurokon, for example, he writes: "He began to age into the ancient Child of Legend. It was a story he had been told from the beginning—that he was the last Carib and the first native...." (*SR*, 68). The term *native* appears to signify a certain racelessness or tribelessness, what Harris refers to in the "History, Fable and Myth" essay as "the inner universality of Caribbean man." Significantly, Yurokon is said to have appeared "when the revolution of conquest was over" (*SR*, 68), underneath "the broken sky of con-

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quest" (*SR*, 72). That he represents the one-and-the-same-ness of hunter and hunted and thus the resolution of all such dichotomies as divide consciousness is indicated by the reference to him as "victor-in-victim":

> As the Caribs withdrew across the ridge of the land and began to descend into a continent of shadow, each knot of ash linked them to the enemy. And Yurokon was the scarred urchin of dreams, victor-in-victim; over the centuries he remained unageing (ageless) as a legend, a curious symptom or holocaust of memory, whose burnt-out stations were equally embryonic as a cradle, fugue of man, unchained chain of fires. (*SR*, 75)

Fugue of man. What Harris is doing, it perhaps bears repeating, is attempting to keep clear of any special pleading on behalf of this or that group, to insist upon a contrapuntal harmony which unites all things. In yet another essay, "The Native Phenomenon," [10] he refers to "a universal host capacity to sustain contrasts," and to "a play of contrasts." In the prefatory note to "The Age of Kaie" he writes: "I have attempted in this story to interpret the rainmaking fabric of the Macusis [a people native to regions of Guyana and Brazil] as a conception of opposites which has largely been obliterated by histories of conquest—Carib, Spanish, French, English, etc." (*AR*, 15). The story itself speaks of the Macusis' "need to reconcile the twin elements" (*AR*, 24) and of a "betrothal of opposites" (*AR*, 20). This fugue or betrothal is the "unwritten symphony" (*SR*, 63) Yurokon plays on his flute, the "music at the beginning of the end of an age" (*SR*, 76)—an age of conquest.

3

> "... on alto, he assembles long lines that roll and plunge as they accumulate to some personal critical mass, then he rams that mass with furious force into the barrier that begins with what the horn will not do. He implies beyond the horn. He tries to sneak through the limitations at some swift, flat angle. He tries to stroke through them, head-on. He makes you hurt with knowing how he felt inside that range, with listening to the faith he had in his bones and ligaments and muscles and breath."
>
> —*Mack Thomas, on Eric Dolphy*

[10] *Common Wealth* (Papers delivered at the Conference of Commonwealth Literature, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark, April 26-30, 1971), ed. Anna Rutherford (Aarhus: Akademisk Boghandel, no date), pp. 144-50.

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> "The heart-searching rhythms born of North American Negro music have been described as 'raucous.'"
>
> —*Wilson Harris*

A correspondence, as Harris himself points out,[11] exists between Yurokon and Carroll, the Black boatman in Harris' first novel *Palace of the Peacock*. Once the crew has undergone its "second death" and entered the Palace of the Peacock, a city of gold somewhat like El Dorado located in the hinterlands of Guyana and Brazil, Carroll (who has played the guitar from time to time throughout the expedition), becomes the mouthpiece for a music symbolizing universal fulfillment or the "indestructable harmony at the heart of the cosmos." It hardly seems possible that this Palace of the Peacock isn't another way of symbolizing the same thing Harris says the *cauda pavonis* or colors of the peacock stand for in his Jungian/alchemical reading of the bush baby myth:

> ...we can look back at the Carib "immortal child" of dreams with the aid of alchemical symbolism for which, as you may know, there are three stages, namely, first of all the *nigredo* or blackness—sometimes called the *massa confusa* or unknown territory (not to be equated superficially with the colour *black* but with an undiscovered realm), secondly, the *albedo* or whiteness (again not to be equated superficially with the colour *white* since it means an inner perspective or illumination, the dawn of a new consciousness), thirdly, *cauda pavonis* or the colours of fulfillment we can never totally realise.
>
> The immortal wraith which the Caribs glimpsed as they crouched over their campfires and consumed a morsel of the enemy carried therefore overtones of eclipse at the hands of Spain (akin to *nigredo*), overtones also of a new dawn (akin to *albedo*) and of a host native (akin to *cauda pavonis* or rainbow peacock).

The kinship between Yurokon and Carroll (Harris calls them cousins) has to do with the fact that they both represent "the native or host consciousness." It is important to keep in mind, however, the fact that the music each becomes a vehicle for is itself a symbol—a "*metaphoric* symphony" Harris calls the music of Yurokon's flute (my emphasis)—a way of speaking of a truth which cannot be embodied. This symbolic music is Harris' writing's way of speaking of an extrapolation beyond itself, just as in Jungian psychology the Self is

[11] "The Native Phenomenon," *Common Wealth*, p. 149.

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said to project images of a wholeness it struggles in vain to embody in thought. (Jung writes of "the indescribable and indeterminable nature of this wholeness," explaining that "wholeness consists partly of the conscious man and partly of the unconscious man. But we cannot define the latter or indicate his boundaries." [12] Harris likewise defines *cauda pavonis*, the Palace of the Peacock, as something "we can never totally realise.")

Such recourse to metaphor betrays an estrangement or distance which the metaphor—the word is derived from a verb meaning "to carry over"—seeks to overcome. The use of metaphor is then in some senses a "confession of weakness," the recognition of a chasm one wishes to be carried across. In the very text of *Palace of the Peacock* Harris alludes to this chasm or distance. The narrator notes an incongruity between the sound Carroll's lips appear to be making, a whistle, and the sound he in fact hears, one like that of an organ. The chasm or incongruity is that which separates heaven from earth: "Carroll was whistling. A solemn and beautiful cry—unlike a whistle I reflected—deeper and mature. Nevertheless his lips were framed to whistle and I could only explain the difference by assuming the sound from his lips was changed when it struck the window and issued into the world" (*PP*, 147). This music, a metaphor for cosmic unity somewhat like "the harmony of the spheres," through its metaphoricity "confesses" an estrangement from the wholeness it intimates. The narrator finds the music, just as Jung does wholeness, indescribable and indeterminable, and his attempt to evoke it is marked by a tentative, rather hesitant movement which whenever it asserts immediately qualifies itself.

> It was an organ cry almost and yet quite different I reflected again. It seemed to break and mend itself always—tremulous, forlorn, distant, triumphant, the echo of sound so pure and outlined in space it broke again into a mass of music. It was the cry of the peacock and yet I reflected far different. I stared at the whistling lips and wondered if the change was in me or in them. I had never witnessed and heard such sad and such glorious music. (*PP*, 147)

The music itself breaks. It is as if Harris wanted to show the metaphor cracking under the weight—the "indestructable harmony at the

[12] *Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 18.

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heart of the cosmos"—it's being made to carry. But the music also mends itself; in the same way, I'd venture to say, that a phantom limb "mends" an amputation. The music/metaphor, that is, can be said to be the phantom limb with which the novel reaches towards a wholeness to which it can only *refer*, the cosmic fulfillment we at once intuit and are "cut off" from.

The spectre of this wholeness in relation to which all expression or manifestation has to be deemed incomplete haunts the world of Harris' works. A similar incongruity between an act of producing sound and the sound produced occurs in *The Secret Ladder* when Fenwick first encounters Poseidon, the African maroon living in the swamps being surveyed by Fenwick's crew:

> Poseidon addressed Fenwick at last. His mouth moved and made frames which did not correspond to the words he actually uttered. It was like the tragic lips of an actor, moving but soundless as a picture, galvanized into comical association with a foreign dubbing and tongue which uttered a mechanical version and translation out of accord with the visible features of original expression. (*SL*, 24)

(The un-Africanness of the name Poseidon, despite its possible allusion to Leo Frobenius' African researches, heightens the sense of schism or incongruousness.) What Harris is attempting to suggest, it seems to me, is a certain sundering or "a play of contrasts" at the heart of things. Insofar as Poseidon represents Adamic seed or primogenitorship ("the Grand Old Man of our history" and "the black king of history" are what he's called in the text), the passage constitutes either a refusal to invest the ancestral past, as is commonly done, with connotations of Edenic wholeness—in which case Poseidon represents not a Golden Age of unity á lá Adam Qadmon but "a form that has already been broken in the past"—or a reminder of Fenwick's and our own estrangement from, and thus the unintelligibility to us of whatever unity Poseidon does represent. These two readings essentially amount to the same thing—an insistence upon the elusiveness or irretrievability of wholeness, upon *différance*. This elusiveness is further suggested by the fact that in three novels, *Palace of the Peacock*, *The Whole Armour* and *Tumatumari*, the Amerindians (again, possibly suggestive of some ancestral or aboriginal wholeness) are *in flight*: "... shattered tribe. A terrible broken family. *On the run!* They were running, running, I tell you. Full retreat. Full flight. God knows who started it. You

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would think the blasted tiger of hell was chasing them" (*WA*, 116, Harris' italics).

Harris' acknowledgement of and struggle with this elusiveness make for the rapport I've been attempting to suggest between his writings and Lorca's idea of the *duende*. Just as Lorca extols the brokenness of *La Niña's* voice, Harris accords brokenness or breakage, symptomatic as well as symbolic of incompleteness, the status of cosmogonic truth: "Yurokon held the twine in his hands as if with a snap, a single fierce pull, he would break it *now* at last. Break the land. Break the sea. Break the savannah. Break the forest. Break the twig. Break the bough" (*SR*, 69). Harris' prose has become more broken itself. Here, for example, is a passage from one of the most recent novels, *Companions of the Day and Night*:

> It was time to take stock of others as hollow bodies and shelters into which one fell. Hollow newspaper into which one fell, newsworthy sacrifice, wrinkled skin. FIRING SQUAD OF RAIN. Headline. Heartline. STOCKMARKET SHELTER, CITY RAINS. Deadline. CANVAS REQUIRED, SACRIFICE REQUIRED.
>
> For centuries it seemed to him now he had been ascending, sliding, falling into rain inch by inch, into shelters of paint, shelters of stone. Sacrificed paint. Sacrificed stone. Lament for the dying sun. This was the altar of his malaise, Idiot shelter, Idiot fascination, fall into the sculptures of the greatest men (upon whom? from whom? times rained). (*CDN*, 58).

Compare this with the passages I quoted above from the earlier novels *Palace of the Peacock* and *The Secret Ladder* and you immediately note an increased reliance on sentence fragments and one- or two-word bursts. The more recent prose is more agitated, more impatient it seems. Its urgency furthers a certain rowdiness or raucousness—something Dereck Walcott has referred to as "audacious"—which typified Harris' work from the very beginning. A sometimes strident, obsessional energy brings Harris' writing, even in its earlier, less choppy phase—in which phase just the opposite tendency, the unusual length and the complexity of the sentences convey this energy—close, to my hearing at least, to that raspy, "unmusical" quality a flamenco singer or a horn player like Dolphy or Anthony Braxton often gets. (Carroll's music, interestingly, is likened to the cry of a peacock, a sound not particularly known for its euphonious qualities.) This stridency or raspiness is both an acknowledgement of and a doing battle with limi-

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tation(" the barrier that begins with what the horn will not do "), a " confession of weakness " and a phantom reach beyond incompleteness.

4

" So on this ground,/write . . . /on this ground/on this broken ground," writes Edward Brathwaite.[13] These lines have to do with the Caribbean predicament—fragmentation, dislocation, etc. They also have to do with writing, and if one calls to mind the Derridean idea that the very possibility of writing signifies and is indebted to a cosmogonic severance known as *différance*, one is prepared to understand " this broken ground " in the way that Harris does. The Caribbean's brokenness participates in a larger-than-local problematic, the universal human predicament Harris calls " cosmic frailty " (TWS, 20), an ontological estrangement or weakness the Caribbean writer, having no historically sustained " coherency " as insulation or defense, is in a position to confess. The problem of large-scale emigration from the Caribbean, for example, the fact that every year an enormous number of West Indians leave home in search of economic, educational, cultural and other opportunities abroad, is not simply a manifestation of the dependency situation peculiar to the Caribbean but is endowed by Harris, himself an emigrant now living in London, with suggestions of a universal condition of exile. In Idiot Nameless' " Manifesto of the Unborn State of Exile " in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* then:

> The education of freedom . . . begins with a confession of the need to lose the base concretion men seek to impose when they talk of one's " native " land (or another's) as if it were fixed and anchored in place. In this age and time, one's native land (and the other's) is always *crumbling*: crumbling within a capacity of vision which rediscovers the process to be not foul and destructive but actually the constructive secret of all creation wherever one happens to be. (*ES*, 101-103, Harris' italics)

This is Harris' version of George Lamming's phrase " the pleasures of exile." It makes what by now in this essay should be a familiar insistence: that some such crumbling dis-closes " a community whose wholeness in reality cannot exist except by confessing its own insubstantial limits " (*TWS*, 49), that only through this confession of crumbling is anywhere, as William Carlos Williams insisted, everywhere.

[13] *The Arrivants* (London: Oxford Univ. Press), pp. 265-66.

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Book Reviews

Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society by Gerald Graff. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979. Pp. ix + 260. $15.00.

There are several different strands to Gerald Graff's argument in this highly polemical book. But no matter what the strand may be—a discussion of Modern and Postmodern fictions and the differences between them, the New Critics, Herbert Marcuse, the "therapeutic society" of Philip Rieff, or the predominance of language theories in contemporary criticism—they all run irrevocably together: they limn an image of a postromantic culture whose literary excesses reflect a general suspicion of "reason" and "rational understanding" which has itself, in turn, led society to lose contact with "indispensable forms of social and historical understanding." Graff's hope is to "restore the connection" between the "leading forces" of our culture and reason itself: "we will have to revise our literary assumptions" (p. 239).

Because of the cohesive multiplicity of Graff's book, it is difficult to reject parts without rejecting the whole. For his argument that so many of the cultural aspects of the literature and criticism of this century have, in their assaults on the referential aims of writing and reading—to make life intelligible and coherent by rational analysis from the perspective of a unified philosophy of life—created the contemporary cultural crisis by subverting all authority, all tradition, and all coherence—this argument can only be accepted if his analysis of each of the important literary and critical movements is so demonstrative that his conclusions cannot be resisted. In other words, serious flaws in any of the individual analyses can subvert the entire text. If, on the contrary, one believes that Graff's wide-ranging conclusions on behalf of "reason," "intelligibility," and "referentiality" can survive errors in the argument, this is only so because one comes to the text already convinced—convinced of a series of statements which are unarguably value-judgments whose "inevitability" demands detailed and unquestionable demonstration. But, unfortunately, there are many specific objections to Graff's book which undermine its value by making it impossible to agree *rationally* with the line of his arguments and his conclusions.

Many partisans on one side or the other of this hydra-headed question of referentiality and "reason" will accept or reject Graff's book out-of-hand. Certain of his sympathizers have already wished that he had been more careful and graceful—here and there. And, of course, the "uncanny" critics, as Hillis Miller calls the "deconstructors," will be largely unaffected by *Literature Against Itself* because it is not a powerful enough text to dislodge them from their various "deconstructive" projects. When placed in the context of these groups especially, *Literature Against Itself* appears as only another battle (or is it rifle-shot?) in the tiresome war between "humanistic" and "avant-garde" critics. But, of course, this struggle—recently spotlighted by the debate between M. H. Abrams

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and Hillis Miller and their friends—should not be considered only in this spotlit context or even in the slightly broader (and slightly yellow) spotlight of such popular reviews as *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, or *The American Scholar*. For whether we like it or not, the responsibility for literature is, as much as it has ever been, now in the hands of the universities where the assumptions and questions regarding literature and society are worked out in practice everyday in and out of the classroom. The success or failure of Graff's book, of his project and program, will be determined by how it is received and *used* in the academy. For this use will tell truly how the "war" between "referential humanists" and "avant-garde revisionists" is going, how the literary, cultural, and political sysmpathies of the society are moving: toward partisan acceptance or rejection or toward a more "objective" understanding of what specific literary and critical texts represent in a culture at any given time. To begin to understand what *Literature Against Itself* represents one must see initially that it is seriously flawed in its assumptions, methods, and conclusions and one must then ask what *interest* might account for these flaws in an intelligent, largely well-informed, and sometimes subtle text.

For example: it is a central thesis of Graff's book that the decentered, pluralistic, non-referential literary-critical theory and practice of Modernity and Postmodernity is itself a product of advanced capitalism; more specifically, it is an attempted revision of capitalism's repressive, scientific, representational culture which has *itself* been made captive by late capitalism and, hence, has become the new orthodoxy of consumer society. Modern revisionists have been only partially (at best) aware of their cooptation precisely because their cultural rebellion and capitalism's needs have destroyed any fixed order of norms against which the usurpation of Modernity's revisionist aesthetic can be seen as such. "One of my central arguments," writes Graff, "is that the real 'avant-garde' is advanced capitalism, with its built-in need to destroy all vestiges of tradition, all orthodox ideologies, all continuous and stable forms of reality in order to stimulate higher levels of consumption" (p. 8). Since space prevents a detailed critique of Graff's book, this issue must serve as an example of the type of problem which denies *Literature Against Itself* the authority it so desperately desires.

First of all, this argument requires great methodological rigor. Without a sustained analysis of "advanced capitalism" to tell us what it is, the argument is groundless. We find it nowhere in the text although there are passing references to Lukacs (in highly problematic contexts), H. M. Enzensberger, and, tellingly, Daniel Bell. In place of analytic descriptions of advanced capitalism, Graff provides mere assertions about its character. This is a crucial omission in the substantive and methodological underpinnings of the book. But beyond even this runs a strand of epistemological and methodological naiveté. For example, even though Graff has not described the economic base of our society, he asserts repeatedly that the cultural superstructure is a mirror of it. This "base-superstructure" metaphor has been so problematic for so long that one wonders why Graff feels he can use it so innocently. His way of thinking about the relation of culture and economy is, unfortunately, simplistic; it is heavily dependent on the straightforward metaphors of "mirroring" and "anal-

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ogy" (pp. 96-97). He writes as if the theoretical advances in dealing with these problems made by Gramsci, Althusser, Macherey, Elias, and even Foucault did not exist. His procedure is always one of "common-sense."

But is it not equally "common-sensical" for Graff to ask how it is that he and some few other neo-conservatives (Christopher Lasch, Wayne Booth, and Daniel Bell) *escape* the captivity of history and "advanced captalism" to tell us about its horrors? Graff repeatedly argues that careful attention to the claims that literature is non-referential, a kind of play, absurdity, merely a semiotic system of codes, the endless substitution of signs reveals that they always rest on a *referential* assertion about the world: it is too chaotic to understand, language can no longer directly refer, or whatever. Thus, Graff argues, the revisionists contradict themselves at their own foundations. But such an argument is essentially only a powerful debater's trick which confuses levels of discourse and produces apparent contradiction. Yet it reveals Graff's tendency to turn the arguments of others back against themselves and, hence, it authorizes others to do the same to him—but on more serious grounds. And when one does, one is too often surprised to find not only that he can be "trapped" just as easily by this debater's trick, but also that the blind spots in his argument create substantial problems. For if advanced capitalism has so powerfully coopted (or produced) the non-referential exertions of a Beckett, Roland Barthes, John Barth, the New Critics, Northrop Frye, James Joyce and T. S. Eliot to some degree—how then has Graff escaped? Wherein lies his power and privilege? By what authority has he raised himself out of the superstructure of advanced capitalism so that he can see it clear and whole?

There are at least two problems here: one is that Graff does not seem aware that one conclusion of his own position is that his own work is a product and reflection of late capitalism, i. e., it is itself part of the pluralism of a consumer society despite its lamentations over the demise of a coherent bourgeois society—it is, after all, on one level, only another commodity being bought and sold in the spotlit academic arena; the other problem is that Graff does not explain by what authority he and a few others have been granted access to stable norms by virtue of which it is possible to see all of the rest of Postmodern culture as "distorted," not just different, as "degenerate," not just unauthorized. What are these norms? Where do they come from? Why has Graff been blessed with an awareness of them? What is the source of his so palpably present anxiety over the loss of central authority, of order, of clear "boundaries" (p. 15)? Modern economy has made the world unreal, and we can only be aware of this by comparison to something more real. Passing over the historical errors, one can still find the following statement illuminating: "People in the nineteenth century could see this fact more easily than we can today, for they could perceive the incursion of this capitalist reality as a profound change—in contrast to what still remained of the feudal order" (pp. 8-9). Taken in the context of other similar remarks, one can see from this statement where Graff's (ideological) sympathies lie—sympathies which control his literary-critical discussions: with a patriarchal, hierarchical "reality" whose presence, or whose lingering memory, functions as a contrasting ideal against which to measure the unreality of our revisionist world. Clearly, what is important in all of this is not

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Graff's nostalgia, which is pronounced and barely obscured by his anger, but his arrogance. This arrogance appears not only in the privileged tone and position he adopts, but in the belittling, leveling attitude he assumes toward all those who deny the priority of "reason," "reality," and "order." "To repudiate art's representational function," he writes, "is not necessarily to leave no link between art and reality, but it is to reduce reality to a trivial role in the relationship" (p. 17). This implies that all of Graff's antagonists have wrongheadedly *denied* the common-sense priority of "reality" as a matter of (perverse) will. Graff is not only not very careful about his definitions—what "reality" means is evident to "common-sense"—but he shows how violent "common-sense" can be. For he is not generous enough to admit that there may be a non-common-sensical *lived-reality* for some who have the misfortune not to be attuned to "norms." Graff's common-sense judgments of reality and of its antagonists willfully exclude the lived-experience of those for whom, e. g., the world and man *are* semiotic structures. Graff's humanistic common-sense violently denies these different "realities" their legitimacy. The irony, of course, is that many of these anti-referential theories are clearly as "real" as Graff's own *inherited* ideas—ideas Kierkegaard would identify with the crowd and Heidegger with the public world of *das Man*. In the name of the wisdom of his fathers, Graff condemns a world without wisdom, without the conditions for it, a world without the necessary remnants of the past to build a future. The arrogance of common-sense is self-parody and low comedy.

The most important and dangerous aspect of *Literature Against Itself* is its concern with authority—a danger that its self-parody will not drive away. Repeating the neo-conservative critiques of Bell and Lasch, Graff claims that the "relativizing of belief" which defines Modernity does not actually free man from systems of repression and oppression, as is claimed, but, in fact, actually "dissolves the authority of anything that tries to resist these systems..." (p. 189). Advances in criticism, for example, which give priority to the act of reading in the constitution of "meaning" reduce the "author-ity" of a text and of a writer's intention; it reduces "meaning" to a multiplicity of "readings" (pp. 156 ff.). Criticism, in this way, extends the decentralization of authoritative coherence which Graff hopes to re-establish. In fact, he claims that the theories of impotence common to Modernity—it is impossible to produce one or a few authorized meanings; any reading is as good as any other; they are all "misreadings"—unknowingly extend the hegemony of late capitalism and, in fact, in this way, gain power. Graff is correct on one level in saying that the "adversary culture" is now "indistinguishable" from the "adversary," but the statement is too crude and incomplete. Where, for example, would one place Foucault (whom Graff pointedly neglects)? Is he the same as Marcuse and the New Critics? Where does one put Umberto Eco and Julia Kristeva, perhaps the two most important and innovative semioticians? Graff must consider them in detail before he can reject semiotics out-of-hand (or is it second-hand?). The rejection of semiotics without a consideration of its central figures and theories reveals how Graff is indeed doing little more than crudely repeating the received wisdom of those whose own interests are threatened by revision and innovation (cf. pp. 177 ff.). This accepted wisdom might have been made a

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bit more self-reflexive and a bit less blatant in its self-interest if Graff had been more aware of the complexities of the contemporary intellectual scene—a scene filled with figures more aware, more informed, and sophisticated than he is. (Compare, for example, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* with Graff on the problems of power and knowledge.)

Yet we must recognize that Graff is also bidding for authority by claiming that his position is powerlessness—but doing it all the time from the advantage of the still powerful rhetoric of "reality" and "common-sense." Whatever appeal *Literature Against Itself* has to the academy will be the result of the power of its conversative rhetoric in a time of increasingly uncomfortable cultural circumstance for the right—but a time, nonetheless, marked by the increasing vigor and voracity of the right. Errors in the interpretation of Kant (p. 38), lack of definition of key terms, failures to confront Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and others, the questionable priority assigned to Marcuse, Poirier, and Sontag as representatives of Postmodernism—all of these flaws will count for little if the authority of the conservative rhetoric is not exposed for what it is—an ideological attempt to regain social "harmony" by appealing to the past and its notions of social (bourgeois) order. It must be said that the negativism of this book—a book which essentially exists only as a parasite on major positive work done by others—is a sign of the dangerous movement of American academic intellectuals to the right, to the past, and away from the potentialities for the future contained in an admittedly somewhat uncertain present.

Since Graff is fond of affiliating Lukacs to his position, it is worth ending with a quotation from his 1920 essay, "The Old Culture and the New Culture": "In bemoaning the collapse of the capitalist order, the bourgeoisie most often claims that its real concern is with the perishing of culture; it formulates its defense of its class interests as if the basis of these interests were the eternal values of culture."

Paul A. Bové

University of Pittsburgh

Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film by Seymour Chatman. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978. Pp. 277. $14.50.

Chatman's *Story and Discourse* is a structuralist poetics of narrative, bringing together in a comprehensive, methodical way various elements of structuralist theory of narrative as it has developed over the last fifty years, and especially in the syntagmatic studies of the sixties by theorists of the French group: Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, and Tzvetan Todorov. The "story" and "discourse" of the title are the structures of substance and expression, respectively, of narrative in whatever medium; "story" consists of the signifiers and signifieds—the latter the "events" and "existents" of narrative—while "discourse" consists of the precise means and modes of their transmission, the techniques by which the events and existents are organized and focused: principally, it emerges, what was called in New Critical parlance "point of view." After a general theoretical

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introduction, the book is about equally divided between consideration of story and discourse.

In his chapters on story Chatman painstakingly defines and illustrates such concepts as "sequence," "contingency," "causality," "veresimilitude," and "motivation" in the context of implied audiences' cultural assumptions about "reality" as well as fictionality. His discussion of the relations of "story time" and "discourse time," derived from Genette's and finely illustrated with analysis of examples from familiar novels and films, is the most coherent and readable I have found, as is his thoughtful consideration of the unresolved problems raised by attempts to construct typologies of plots. Those of Aristotle, Frye, Crane, Propp, Todorov, and Bremond are specifically reviewed, concluding with Chatman's warning that more detailed analysis of the form/content relations of narratives in the separate genres (such as Barthes' *S/Z*) remains to be done before a convincing typology can be formulated.

Chatman's discussion of space—"story space" and "discourse space"—in which the existents (characters and settings) of both fiction and film have their being illuminates a basic aspect of narrative that, like time, has often been obscure in theorizing. Tracing the history of theory of character from Aristotle through the modern structuralists, Chatman advocates an "open theory of character" which treats "characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions," and provides a detailed definition and grid of "traits" to be used in describing characters and distinguishing between "events" and "traits" in the structure of a text (not as easy as one might suppose, as Chatman's examples show). Drawing again upon Barthes' *S/Z*, Chatman defends the legitimacy of A. C. Bradley's much-maligned psychological method as a "useful and natural way to analyze characters," so long as one remembers that the characters are not "real" people but only, in R. S. Crane's term, "concrete semblances" which we interpret in part by our knowledge of what "real" people are like: "Iago is 'cold,' not cold." The exposition of setting also introduces useful criteria, although in the end Chatman has to recommend further development of "heuristic principles of categorization."

Most of the second half of Chatman's book is devoted to what he calls the "discourse," or "expression plane" of narrative, its "set of narrative statements... a certain posture in ballet, a series of film shots, a whole paragraph in a novel, or only a single word." Having divided such statements into "process" and "stasis" statements in his introduction, Chatman moves here immediately into the questions of "mediation," and of the supposed dichotomy of showing and telling, which he prefers to see as combined in a "spectrum of possibilities" ranging from "non-narrated" to maximally narrated. He gives substantial attention to a "fascinating new personage on the aesthetic horizon," the "narratee" (discovered, Chatman says, by Gerald Prince), the personage to whom the story is intentionally told or written.

The whole discussion of narration is facilitated by an incisive demonstration of the relevance of speech-act theory to analysis of various types of narrative statements, and Chatman surveys the various permutations of narrators with clarifying expositions of a number of the vexed terms: "interior monologue," "stream of consciousness," "indirect free style." One of the most stimulating and

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potentially useful sections is that on different kinds of narratorial commentary: interpretive, judgmental, generalizing, and self-reflexive.

It is possible to object to particular points: Chatman's treatment of the implied author seems to me a misconstruction of Booth's original definition in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, and his bald assertion that events, characters, and "details of setting" are the *only* signifieds of narrative statements is at best arguable. Many readers are likely to feel a certain discomfort with the basic division posited between the structure of substance and the structure of the telling (the place of narratorial commentary, for example, is not altogether clearly in one camp or the other). However, Chatman's scheme is remarkably workable for the description and comparison of individual texts. We do well to recall the linguists' maxim: "all grammars leak." This one proves buoyant and serviceable, nonetheless.

Although written texts are the primary loci of Chatman's examples, the references to film are illuminating, not so much as contributions to a complete theory of film narrative, but as contrasting to the literary examples and further clarifying what is essential to narrativity per se. Oddly enough given Chatman's previous work on style, he devotes little attention to it here, except in the analysis of direct and indirect representation of speech and mental experience, thus implying that style is not essential to the structural study of narrative. The second half of the book is marred by uncorrected errors, some of them jarring (why should Ford's Dowell appear as "Dowling," Joyce's "Two Gallants" as "The Gallants"?); and the placing of the footnotes at the bottom of the pages, while welcome in itself, causes problems when there is no bibliography and no indexing of many individual secondary works and editors.

I have summarized the contents of *Story and Discourse* at length in part simply to support Chatman's contention that he has dealt, in a reasoned, thorough way, with all the fundamental issues pertaining to the structures of any and all narrative texts, and in part to demonstrate how conservative and common-sensical a theorist he turns out to be. His book aims, successfully, at the advanced student and teacher of literature who have read *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *The Nature of Narrative*, and perhaps some work of the Russian and French formalist-structuralist schools. For the most part Chatman resists being drawn into the vocabulary, or the equations and models of post-structuralist semiotics and deconstruction, or even of the more extreme positions of his mentors. He puts into perspective much structuralist thought on narrative and provides a refurbished taxonomy and a method for comparison and interpretation of narratives in the same or related genres. Because the book is so clearly written, and its examples so elegantly analyzed to demonstrate the theory, because it relates itself so firmly to the tradition inherited from Aristotle, it bids to become required reading for students of narrative, taking its place on the reserve shelves beside *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, *The Nature of Narrative*, and Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*, perhaps giving them a nudge into still-respected but less central positions.

Suzanne Ferguson

The Ohio State University

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Dionysos Slain by Marcel Detienne, translated by Mireille Muellner and Leonard Muellner. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 130. $10.95.

This book, a translation of *Dionysos mis à mort* (1977), is a collection of four essays on classical mythology, united more by their author's structuralist methodology than by any intrinsic relationship. The second chapter excepted, all first appeared as articles between 1973 and 1975. The introductory essay ("The Greeks Aren't Like the Others"), in the guise of a structuralist manifesto, is in fact a witty and incisive polemic against traditional philology's historicist treatment of classical mythology and its sentimental idealization of classical culture. This opening broadside reverberates throughout the book's later pages. Its combativeness bears unhappy witness to the uncompromising hostility between the vast majority of traditional classicists and the structuralist left-wing. Yet Detienne is an excellent philologist himself: his mastery of the ancient materials is profound, his traditional techniques faultless when he chooses to use them, and his scholarship impeccable. But too often he refuses to make use of traditional philological techniques that would in fact help to validate his structuralist analysis.

Such intransigence undermines his most stimulating essay, "The Orphic Dionysos and Roasted Boiled Meat" (ch. 4). Here, in a brilliant and complex argument, Detienne holds that the Orphic myth in which the Titans dismember, boil, roast, and sacrificially devour the infant Dionysus is articulated in a culinary code whose message is to attack and subvert "the whole politicoreligious system." That system was allegedly based on the blood sacrifice of animals and the community's feast on their flesh. Marshaling the most far-flung evidence from over a thousand year period, Detienne carefully maps the many significant variations and oppositions the myth expresses contrary to normal culinary and sacrificial practice in ancient Greece. Thus, he demonstrates that the myth's insistence on boiling followed by roasting contradicts the mandatory sequence of the state sacrifice. For the Orphics to create this myth was to deny a history of culture from bestiality to civilization which was symbolically condensed in that sacrifice and represented man's mediatory position between gods and beasts. While the "totalization" of ethnographic context is the cornerstone of Detienne's argument, his obdurate insistence on synchronic analysis and his adamant rejection of what he derides as historicism needlessly weaken this esay. He treats the "politicoreligious system" and Orphism as monoliths, seemingly the same in all places and at all times, and texts are consulted as evidence without regard for provenance or milieu. But Greek cities and their "politicoreligious systems" differed greatly from one another, changing historically in very important ways; nor are all the ancient sources equally trustworthy or of the same value; finally, "Orphism" and its doctrines are open to the widest scholarly debate and confusion, the ancient sources rife with contradictions, obscurities, and deliberate fabrications. To make his argument work, Detienne must unbend enough to submit such generalizations about Greek politics and religion to a tougher *Quellenkritik* and a more rigorous philological and historical analysis. It is possible to do so without vitiating in any way his important insights.

Unfortunately, too, the argumentation of the various essays relies more on

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rhetoric than on logic. Important evidence and analysis are laid down side by side and too often the only bridge is a rhetorical, not a logical connection. This weakness is most obvious in the book's longest essay, "The Perfumed Panther" (ch. 2), in essence an examination of Ovid's versions of the Atalanta and Adonis myth: "As a liminal place where socially dominant sexual relations are as if suspended, the land of the hunt is open to subversion of amorous pursuits, whatever their process or modality" (p. 26). It is a provocative treatment, but frustrating in its amorphousness.

Yet despite such shortcomings, this book represents a major advance in the study of classical mythology. What remains to be done is more fully to integrate structuralist or semiotic methods and techniques into traditional classical scholarship. This approach is long overdue.

K. R. WALTERS

Wayne State University

Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia by Richard McCoy. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 230. $14.00.

The mythologizing of Sir Philip Sidney after his death as an Elizabethan culture-hero has its counterpart in his critical mystification as an intellectual-literary saint. The respect and attention this author now receives are well-deserved: considering most of the literature written in his own lifetime, his fiction, poetry, and criticism are an historically remarkable achievement. But the kind of revisionist analysis Richard McCoy sets out to do in his study is long overdue. He detects in this writer's political life of "noble failure" (p. 9) unresolvable conflicts between autonomy and submission that manifest themselves in the "inconclusive development, thematic contradictions, and problems of closure" (p. 26) of the major works. Because Sidney could not or would not reconcile, for example, his need to exercise political initiative with the demand for prudent submission to monarchical authority, McCoy argues, works like the *Old Arcadia* and the unfinished *New Arcadia* "culminate in a pattern of ambivalence and evasion" (p. 216), the latter work incomplete supposedly because Sidney refused to come to the "harrowing conclusions" (p. 163) towards which he was moving. McCoy perceptively discusses the complex conflicts of sympathy and judgment Sidney creates for his reader, noting that this author's demand for good will from his audience is one attempt at disguising (at the end of the *Old Arcadia*, for instance) the disturbing conflicts between romantic rewards and moral realities. Both formalist and historical critics have tried to explain away such problems in Sidney's work.

Tactfully employing psychoanalytic insights, McCoy delineates Sidney's personal style in all its self-destructive magnificence—a combination of passive aggression and romantic heroism that is largely the product of sociopolitical failure. He argues that this style and the the literature that reflects it should be understood in the context of "the evasive, contradictory tendencies of Elizabethan culture" (p. 214). But what this study sorely needs is a better articu-

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lation of this historical matrix, definitions of the necessarily inconsistent Elizabethan sociocultural codes that would allow us to read Sidney's prose and poetry with a better sense of their culture-specific meanings. McCoy's discussions of the ending of the *Old Arcadia*, of the development of the episodes added in the second book of the *New Arcadia*, and of the third book of the revised romance are critically sensitive and informative, but he usually relates the persistent conflicts between autonomy and submission to Sidney's biography and to such intellectual traditions as the Huguenot theory of subaltern magistracy and Calvinist moral determinism, rather than to the specific sociopolitical rules and dynamics of late Elizabethan England. His treatment of *Astrophil and Stella* (the weakest section of the book) would have benefitted from an examination of the precise personal and social contexts of these coterie poems: we need to understand how, for Sidney and his original readers, the vocabulary of love was encoded by sociopolitical realities in such a way that it could express effectively his frustrated ambitions.

McCoy is right to direct our attention to the Elizabethan court in which the problematic relationship of courtier and Queen produced characteristic forms of aggression and passivity, heroic posturing and impotent frustration—all captured in the anachronistic feudal ceremonials of the courtly tournaments and tilts in which Sidney himself participated. But before we can finish the work of demystifying this author—i. e. disentangling his work from the culturally- and self-generated myths that saturate it—we must extend the analysis McCoy has begun in his book by taking a hard and systematic look at Elizabethan culture and society. The result may be, as McCoy's conclusions suggest, a less aesthetically neat and coherent Sidney, but it should be a more fascinatingly problematic one.

ARTHUR F. MAROTTI

Wayne State University

The Living Temple: George Herbert and Catechizing by Stanley Fish. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1978. Pp. ix + 201. $11.50.

In this modestly-proportioned book Stanley Fish seeks a way of talking about Herbert's poetry that will do justice to the "simultaneous presence... of order and surprise." Too many critics of Herbert's poetry, Fish says, emphasize one of these elements at the expense of the other, and he asks how it is "that the same body of poetry has been the basis for reaching contradictory, but equally persuasive, interpretive conclusions." The thesis of his book is "that the answer to this question will be found in the forms, concerns, and conventions of the Reformation cathechism."

Herbert himself was a catechist, of course, and in *A Priest to the Temple* he tells us something of his method. Unlike many of his Protestant contemporaries, Herbert regarded catechizing as (in Fish's words) a "strategy" rather

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than an "examination." The goal of Herbert's catechizing is "not the orderly disposition of a body of knowledge, but the arrival at that knowledge of a respondent who has come to it himself." Let us substitute "poet" and "reader" for "catechist" and "pupil," suggests Fish, and we will see that "rather than being a sincere report of a mind in the act of changing, the poem is a sincere effort on the part of the poet-catechist to change his reader-pupil's mind." Hence the "order and surprise": the order is that of the poet-catechist, the surprise the reader-pupil's.

Not only individual poems, but the three-part structure of *The Temple* and the metaphor of the temple itself are best understood against the background of the catechistical tradition. What Fish calls the "rhetoric of templehood" informs many of the popular catechisms, as in this introductory prayer to John Mayer's abridged catechism in 1623:

> Thou which art the Master-builder of thine owne house, settle me as one of thy living stones upon the right foundation, Jesus Christ; in whom I may daily grow up, till that all the building coupled together, groweth to an holy Temple in the Lord.

And in the ambiguity of the word "building" (is it a verbal, signifying "work to be done" or a noun, signifying "work done"?) Fish finds the "same contradiction that we shall find at the heart of Herbert's poetry... that is, in its equivocation between a structure that is precarious, shifting, and unfinished (work to be done) and a structure that is firm, secure, and complete (work already done)."

Further evidence that *The Temple* was composed on a cathechistical model Fish finds in "The Church Porch" and "The Church Militant." "The Church Porch" corresponds to the instruction that catechumens in the early church received before being baptized and to the preparations that Christians of Herbert's day should make before receiving communion. And the content of "The Church Militant" "corresponds perfectly to a standard feature of the early catechisms, the *narratio* or 'history of salvation' as it is embodied in the career of the Church."

Despite Fish's claim that his interpretation explains more of *The Temple* than rival ones, the number of poems he actually analyzes is very small indeed, and ninety-seven of the hundred and sixty-nine are not even mentioned by him, among them "Aaron," "Affliction 2, 3, 4, and 5," "The Bag," "The Collar," "Employment 1 and 2," "Peace," "The Pulley," "Redemption," "The Temper 2," and "Vanitie 1." Fish could of course talk about these poems as brilliantly as anyone if he wanted to; it is not at all clear, however, that his discussion of them would be illuminated by reference to the catechistical tradition. Of the poems he does talk about, his method, as might be expected, is more successful with some than with others. Readers who want to test the method for themselves should read the discussion of "Love III" on pp. 131-136.

Washington University William G. Madsen

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William Hazlitt: Critic of Power by John Kinnaird. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. Pp xv + 429. $22.50.

When Walter Jackson Bate assigned a prominent place to Hazlitt in his influential anthology, *Criticism: the Major Texts* (1952), he set in motion a reassessment of Hazlitt's work and of his place among the great critics from Dryden to Arnold. Since then, two biographies and two studies dealing with Hazlitt's critical ideas have considerably sharpened the picture, and now (timed to coincide with the second centenary of Hazlitt's birth in 1778) John Kinnaird offers us a comprehensive biography of the mind of this most versatile of writers. Criticism, in this instance, must be understood in the widest sense of the term, to include "philosophy, politics and society, painting and theater, manners and morality and religion," as well as literature. And it is Hazlitt's conception of power—political, psychological, and artistic-creative—that runs like a guideline throughout this widely ranging discussion. The book explores with admirable clarity the life of a passionate mind engaged in the intellectual and political turbulence of the time. It portrays an astute and influential critic.

But it also has another aim. It is intent on rehabilitating Hazlitt's reputation in relation to his famous contemporaries and, further, on proving his "centrality" in English Romanticism. Bate, who thought that Hazlitt's importance had indeed been underrated, presented him as "easily the most representative critic in English romanticism." But Kinnaird goes further; he insists on moving Hazlitt practically to the center of Romantic theory. As a result, a tone of defensiveness enters the discussion. Kinnaird becomes overly sensitive to the familiar charges: that Hazlitt practices a kind of critical impressionism in his description of paintings, that he is merely a character critic when he writes about Shakespeare, that the early disciple of Coleridge and Wordsworth, however rebellious, never became a great critic in his own right. He reprimands not only such "insulting" detractors as George Watson but also the merely restrained admirers of Hazlitt who do not quite appreciate, or else do not quite understand, his originality as a theorist and practical critic. In a spirited peroration, he claims, among other things, that Hazlitt "stands unrivalled as the English critic with the best (that is, most consistently confirmed) record of judgment." In short, Professor Kinnaird is generally more convincing as interpreter of Hazlitt's work than as guardian of his reputation.

ALFRED SCHWARZ

Wayne State University

George Eliot and the Visual Arts by Hugh Witemeyer. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 238. $19.50.

Of all the novelists whose greatness is an article of faith, George Eliot is most in danger of impalement on her own wise aphorisms. Many of her most serious readers even today would echo Henry James' reservations in the *Atlantic Monthly* that her novels emerge strenuously from her "moral consciousness": "They are

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deeply studied and elaborately justified, but they are not *seen* in the irresponsible plastic way." Insofar as Hugh Witemeyer acknowledges that seeing is an irresponsible act, his study of George Eliot and the visual arts breaks important ground. He defines persuasively the essential pictoralism of George Eliot's imagination, painstakingly recovering the works of art that were important to her, the values she found in them, and the ways in which they might have influenced her novels.

It is good to recover the visual and tactile base of novels that are too readily paraphrased into abstractions. Witemeyer's pioneering beginning is disappointing only in the modesty with which it insists on its own boundaries. Like James's George Eliot, Witemeyer limits his discussion of art to the morally paraphrasable. He himself refuses to approach his material in "the irresponsible plastic way" indispensable to important criticism as well as to art, eschewing the "intuitive school" of theoretical exploration he associates with Mario Praz in favor of a meticulously limited listing of works Eliot is known to have admired. He leaves us still in need of a study, not of sources and influences, but of the essentially visual nature of George Eliot's perceptions, and the ways in which these tend to subvert her overt moral positions. Witemeyer does not venture beyond the knowable; all his material is worked into consistent moral schemes, a method of limited value in approaching a novelist as sensitive as George Eliot was to the indefinable power of the senses, the omnipresence of mystery and dread.

In the mainstream of Eliot criticism, with its proclivity for what in Eliot is amenable to modern thought, Witemeyer is a maverick: he adheres staunchly to the boundaries of the past, placing Eliot in a context of mid-Victorian aesthetic assumptions. He refuses to approach her work with the surgical audacity of a Leavis, willing to amputate the novels, if necessary, in order to provide us with material to which we can respond. Witemeyer's Eliot must be taken whole and Victorian, even if she is often undigestable. Despite the infusions of light that so often dissolve contour at crucial moments in her fiction, Witemeyer will not even allow Eliot to be seen as a proto-Impressionist: her taste in art was that of her age, representational and often full of cumbersome allegory. By our lights, he admits, she seems a naive art critic, but he insists upon the limitations of the Eliot he discovers. In his depiction of her taste as in his total concept, the integrity and the incompleteness of the book lie in its fidelity to its own limitations.

Much of Witemeyer's research is interesting and helpful. A solid discussion of Eliot and genre painting breaks down our easy stereotypes of her affinities with Dutch art, which actually influenced her very little; Witemeyer is precise in his delineation of the sorts of genre painting that were important to her. The strongest discussion is a long, complex anatomy of varieties and philosophies of portraiture as it influenced, ambivalently, Eliot's characterizations. Witemeyer is shrewd in his association of portraiture both with exemplary human types, echoing Eliot's own need to uncover the human ideal in the real, and with an aristocracy that seemed to her increasingly effete and decadent. Thus, in her own portraits, we see her religious humanism at war with her social disgust. The book could do more with the class connotations of various forms of art, both in Eliot's works and in her times. It lays the groundwork for such a study, as well as for a

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bolder, more theoretical and cross-generic exploration of the sort Witemeyer repudiates as "intuitive." For Witemeyer limits himself to what George Eliot knew and said, ignoring the complex visual achievements of her novels. Finally, we learn yet again that she was a Christian humanist, her exemplary visual pictorialism leading the reader to a moral apprehension of the real. All this indefatigable spadework leads to little that is new.

The importance of Witemeyer's topic, the interest of his research, but their dissipation in innocuous conclusions may spring in part from his insistence upon George Eliot as a representative Victorian rather than a woman out of her time as well as within it. He tends to see her exclusively as a composite of others' influences. He defines her aesthetic as virtually identical with Ruskin's, which itself is pruned of many divisions and ambiguities, and unblushingly identifies her opinions on all conceivable topics with those of George Henry Lewes. It seems unwise as well as uninteresting to define as her lover's mouthpiece a novelist who wrote so scathingly about docile women; here as elsewhere, the Eliot Witemeyer elides seems a richer figure for study. Of her decision not to have children, he writes highhandedly that it "suggests that she considered illegitimacy too cruel a handicap to be imposed upon the innocent" (p. 124). Since little suggests that Eliot ever wanted children, this argument hangs on a tenuous thread. This sort of banal misconception of her character limits Witemeyer's study of both woman and artist. Since he shows so little interest in the actual visual effects of the novels, a potentially interesting chapter on Leighton's illustrations of *Romola* (Eliot's only novel to be illustrated) becomes extraneous, a study of Leighton alone rather than of his visual techniques in relation to the author's. Similarly, Witemeyer often substitutes Eliot's own pious rationalizations for the innovation and complexity of her actual accomplishments. One feels throughout that he is most at ease with George Eliot when she is placed at second hand.

For all that it does not do, Witemeyer's book is important in that it opens for further study the wonderful topic of Victorian "wordpainting." We have much to learn about the readerly response to Victorian painting, and our ingrained revulsion against "purple prose" has kept us from appreciating the intense pictorialism of all Victorian literature. Most of all, we need to understand the marriage between the verbal and the visual to which so much Victorian art aspires. Though Witemeyer's shunning of "intuitive criticism" gives him a myopia that weakens this early tentative cross-generic study, I hope that many readers and future writers will follow him through the door he has opened.

NINA AUERBACH

University of Pennsylvania

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The New Woman and the Victorian Novel by Gail Cunningham. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978. Pp. viii + 172. $21.50.

Olive Schreiner: Feminism on the Frontier by Joyce Avrech Berkman. St. Alban's, Vermont:Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., 1979. Pp. 88. $11.00.

At the beginning of *Woman and Labour* (1911), Olive Schreiner states that "wherever there is a general attempt on the part of women of any society to readjust their position in it, a close analysis will always show that the changed or changing conditions of that society have made woman's acquiescence no longer necessary or desirable." Her declaration would make an excellent epigraph for both of the books under review. The "New Woman" phenomenon in late nineteenth-century literature could never have occurred if social conditions had not already changed so much that new women of some kind were necessary for the survival of society. So too, Olive Schreiner's contemporary fame and present-day obscurity rest in part on her embodiment of her generation's attempt to change the conditions of that society. Both of these books are to be welcomed as part of a larger revaluation of literature at the end of the nineteenth century. Although the authors leave many questions unanswered, they have laid a solid foundation for others to follow.

The New Woman and the Victorian Novel begins with a description of the themes of "Marriage, Morality and the Model Woman" to be found in Victorian fiction. Since Cunningham is outlining dominant sterotypes she concentrates on such minor fiction as *East Lynne* (1861), *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) and *Ruth* (1853). The passive, pure or priggish women described will be familiar to all readers of Victorian fiction, though many might feel that Cunningham has oversimplified the issues in an effort to demonstrate convincingly what the New Woman fiction was revolting against. Far more useful is her succinct and effective analysis of the works of Grant Allen (author of the notorious *The Woman Who Did* [1895]), Sarah Grand, "Iota," and Emma Brooke, the most famous proponents of the new fiction. All of these writers, and many others, achieved fame and large sales during the mid-nineties for advocating a new model of sexual purity. A New Woman was to be educated in regard to sexual matters (the effects of syphilis was a frequent theme) so as to understand and wisely control her own—and her lover's—sexual impulses. This call for sexual education was accompanied by a vigorous attack on the current forms of marriage. This, far more than the question of redefining purity, aroused more traditional critics against the New Woman fiction. Grant Allen's "woman who did" refuses to marry on principle, though she remains intensely faithful to her chosen lover; she bears a lifetime of social ostracism for her fidelity. One of the central paradoxes of this fiction, particularly well analyzed by Cunningham, is the emphasis on the necessity of greater freedom for women and the concurrent price that must be paid by its pioneers. Death, nervous disorders and unhappiness dogged these idealistic women.

Many readers will be most interested in the chapters on Hardy, Meredith and Gissing, discussing the ways in which these men—all "major" writers in contrast to the almost exclusively female "minor" writers—used the New Woman theme for their own purposes. They shared with their contemporaries the prevailing

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discontent with sexual mores and marriage, but in all three Cunningham traces a preference for traditional female virtues, untouched by modern corrupting ideas. Everard Barfoot, in *The Odd Women* (1893), has endless examples of men destroyed by the ignorant behavior of their wives. Even Widdowson, clinging to Ruskinian notions of wifely duty, is actually correct in assuming that Monica is untrue to him in thought, if not in deed. But we never see the effects of drunken or feckless husbands on upright women, as we do in the stories of George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne). Hardy's women no matter how high spirited and intelligent, are also temptresses entrapping men so that they never fulfill their ambitions. Indeed, capriciousness and childishness characterize virtually all of Hardy's heroines. No wonder contemporary feminists saw Hardy's heroines as "men's women," and disliked the "irresistable fascination" so many male critics praised.

Cunningham's work has many strengths, which make its weaknesses more disappointing. Although the literary links between the popular and the prominent writers are well sketched, Cunningham has narrowed her terms of reference too exclusively to the literary and therefore has failed to place her theme in the necessary wider context. The relationship of this "new" literature to the social and political movements of the times is barely considered. Emma Brooke, author of *The Superfluous Woman* (1894), was an early student at Newnham and an active Fabian. Sarah Grand was a leader in the suffragist cause. Why sexuality and marriage came under attack during these years is never explored. Nor is the abrupt decline in interest in these issues in the late nineties (Oscar Wilde's trial and the consequent suppressing of sexual freedom are not mentioned). *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* suffers from the modesty of its aims; a more ambitious theoretical base which included social and literary relationships would have made this a major work.

The absence of Olive Schreiner from Cunningham's book is symptomatic of its weaknesses. Schreiner (1855-1920) is mysteriously forgotten, perhaps, as Joyce Berkman says, because she doesn't fit into any category. She initiated the New Woman theme in *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), and wrote widely on sexuality, feminism, eugenics, imperialism and socialism. In her life and works she embodied many of the goals the fictional heroines of Cunningham's book struggled so ardently to achieve. Close friends with such pioneers in social and sexual thought as Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and Karl Pearson, Schreiner was in touch with the leading ideas of her time—and made a significant contribution to them herself. She insisted upon the importance of sexuality in a woman's psychic makeup, was a cultural relativist who defended African and Boer culture, and was a staunch pacifist. Throughout her life she suffered for her beliefs, from such petty annoyances as being repeatedly thrown out of her lodgings by irate landladies (she admitted men to her rooms whenever they happened to call) to suffering house arrest and the burning of all her books and papers during the Boer War. Her debilitating asthma attacks, like the neurasthenia of the fictional New Women, were clearly rooted in unresolved anxiety about how to combine and fulfill her personal needs and political beliefs.

The little criticism that exists of Schreiner has concentrated on defending her place in English or African literary history. *Olive Schreiner: Feminism on*

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the Frontier, in contrast, looks at the totality of Schreiner's output, placing it in its appropriate historical context. At times Berkman suffers from the opposite defect of Cunningham; she provides so much background that Schreiner's works get lost. I would have liked more about Schreiner's literary innovations; for instance, her use of dreams and allegories as a means of expressing states of mind was very attractive to her contemporaries, though they did not imitate her. Berkman does not always capture the excitement and energy of Schreiner's life and ideas–her prose is occasionally turgid and she tends to cover too much ground too quickly–but she has done a valuable job in placing before the reader Schreiner's major strengths and weaknesses. As she explains, Schreiner's vision of woman's future and her analysis of woman's nature and social role were particularly penetrating. The passionate, thwarted feminism of Lyndall, heroine of *African Farm*, went far beyond New Woman polemics. Clearly a full-scale study of Schreiner's literary achievement is needed, specifically treating her work in the context of the period. In the meantime, Berkman's monograph will help to redress the undue neglect of Schreiner by Cunningham and other literary critics.

MARTHA VICINUS

Indiana University

Failure and Success in America: A Literary Debate by Martha Banta. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. Pp. 568. $30.00 cloth; $12.50 paper.

This book claims the best of American writing is found in those literary achievements which demand "more than survival" but "less than perfection" (3). Banta presents an exclusively national reading of American literature dependent upon the transformation of literature into solely the expression of ideas in words. In effect, the book understands American literature to be one long and argumentative answer to the Franklin of the *Autobiography*– i.e., to the man whose care about achieving success and the appearance of success was not marred by worry over that separation. Thus her essentially American writers, among whom Emerson, Thoreau, William and Henry James, Twain, Henry Adams, Gertrude Stein, and Norman Mailer are the most important, succeed insofar as they recognize, accept, and then overcome failure.

They first reaffirm the "force of the idea" (179) of American as sacred experience by reconstituting success as "aesthetic and moral" rather than "tangible and material" (133). They then provide to us and themselves what is for Banta the enduring moral lesson of our national literature: a constant battering by the reality principle which elicits a resistance to the siren call of the ideal. They and we must learn, in the words of Henry James at age 13 to his sister, Alice, to find our "pleasures under difficulties" (257). At the cost of treating philosophy and literature as identical systems of signification, William James occupies a particularly prominent place in the argument as the exemplar of those "really tough imaginations" because he teaches us to locate "the *topos* (good place) in the *eutopos* (no place)" (450).

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This thematic, ideational, and elitist approach to American literature is perfectly congruent with our major critical traditions, especially as it measures the writings by standards necesarily prior and extrinsic to them. For Banta, American literature is a category as ideal as it was for Margaret Fuller in 1846; both are able to discuss "what does not yet exist" (47) and do, although at the cost of ignoring Emerson's warning that we pay as much attention to "what they were" as "what they designed." The preference for design has the consequence of widening the scope of literature; letters, journals, diaries, biographies, lectures, and memoirs are now available for the argument. However, correct and desirable as it is to include these as literature, two drawbacks vitiate the approach. Rather than applying the skills of literary criticism to these materials, Banta presents them as if their non-fictional status privileges their gloss on the fiction. Even worse, she finds herself relying too much on weaker fictional texts, as if the worse the book, the more typically American. Nowhere is this more so than in the use of Norman Mailer; the argument depends upon his *Of a Fire on the Moon* in which self-consciousness becomes self-parody for Mailer, Banta, and America.

Despite the embarrassing presence of Franklin, treated here much as he was by D. H. Lawrence almost sixty years ago, Banta's American literature is a timeless construct from the Puritans to the prurient. Put more bluntly, history is an empty category here, capable only of marking the gross swings from optimism to pessimism and half-way back. Although she denies that the ideal may serve to indicate radical social and political alternatives, Banta sneaks it in the back door as the standard of literature and culture through a disdain for and dismissal of mere "data." An unfortunate consequence, although one not explicit in the text, is the development of a category of Unamerican writers and writings. Cooper, certainly as obsessed as any American with failure and success, is one; so too are Hawthorne, treated primarily as if he were the author of unfinished romances, and Melville, at best a springboard back into the more comforting world of Emerson and Thoreau. My guess is that the skepticism of these writers, especially about the nature of language, and in the case of the latter two, their refusal to provide a key in non-fiction to the American qualities of the fiction, makes them particularly resistant to her approach.

An ontological certitude shapes the consideration and criticism of American literature and culture. Royce and James are permitted to argue absolute versus subjective knowledge; but the nature of being and the nature of the subject, defined variously as the individual, literature, and the nation, are unchanging and immediately accessible. The worlds of facts and of words become transparent media through which the truth always shines. Norman Mailer supposedly responds directly to Henry Adams; more dangerously, we learn that Samuel Sewall is "a member of the generation contemporaneous with Goodman Brown" (299), a contention which not only blurs the distinction between history and fiction but which denies that Hawthorne's historical fiction is predicated upon the existence of Sewall and his fellows. Thus not only history, but intention, surprisingly enough, matters little; once again we confront the news that American literature is marked by the meaning and stress placed upon the adjective while the noun drowns in its wake.

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Metaphor and idea dominate the form and content of *Failure and Success in America* to the exclusion of all else. Indeed, Banta refuses to distinguish metaphor as one specific means of gaining and organizing knowledge. She remarks that the "destructive movement away from 'mothers' is crucial to many of Melville's narrative structures" (72), a reading which somewhat perversely ignores the greater impact of "fathers" in these texts by citing only *Pierre*. Further, by setting "mothers" in quotes, Professor Banta indicates her awareness of its use as metaphor; yet the form of her argument forbids the exploration of mothers except as metaphors. Ishmael's near-destruction thus follows abandonment of the land, his "mother," for the sea. Why he should be so foolish is not explained; nor is it apparently meaningful that this mother is metaphoric rather than actual.

Clearly this is no standard academic treatise (except in the world of American Studies and its preference for the "unscientific method") although it makes one wish it were. In place of readings of particular texts, with the exception of *The American* and *Huckleberry Finn*, we get brief allusions which slide into other texts on the basis of a word and a pun—sometimes those of the authors, sometimes not. A discussion of Thoreau's gratitude that he was born in the "nick of time" leads to William James' talk of "my nick" and then to "Old Nick" himself (204-05). Somewhere, too, Nick Carraway obtrudes his name and presence. Rather than devise and defend her own methodology, seemingly an unnecessary and always an unwelcome task for American cultural critics, Banta adopts that of her authors. Their interest in and fascination with the transformations of language and their assumptions about the role of consciousness become hers; Thoreau's hope and Adams' despair seem equally true and mark the limits of the debate rather than its beginning.

The metaphor for the argument as a whole is that of a "house," surely the most prevalent and prominent of American tropes. Whereas the critic often tries to provide the blueprint, Banta gives us a tour through a labyrinthine mansion filled with members of the family: Waldo and William James sit on the porch, bid us welcome, and assure us we have nothing to fear; Henry James stands in a corner of the drawing room observing us observing him; Mark Twain swaps lies with the servants in the kitchen and claims their life is real because it is so determined; Henry Adams waits in the study for his call to service; Henry Thoreau takes the hot, uncomfortable room under the roof in the belief he has the best view; Norman Mailer shakes the ashes down in the furnace and tells Bigger Thomas the secret is to get the fire even hotter; and Gertrude Stein's postcard, perhaps a bit hard to read, lies on the hall table. If I have caricatured these writers, I have not violated the text of *Failure and Success in America*. They are frozen in a world of metaphors, a paradoxical fate given the nature of metaphor, but an inevitable one when the tension which characterizes metaphor and literature is collapsed.

We do not really learn somehing new about these writers and America from this book. Instead, we are forcibly reminded just how concerned and obsessed they were with success, a point worth reiteration. But we should question a conclusion that claims Thoreau or Adams or Mailer, individually or together, wish to teach us to be content with "just enough." History, psychology, audience,

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and intention are missing from a book which seeks not so much to explicate and evaluate the literary debate about failure and success as it desires to become the latest addition to a continuing discourse. It is not enough.

ROSS J. PUDALOFF

Wayne State University

Mark Twain as a Literary Comedian by David E. E. Sloane. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979. Pp. xi + 280. $12.95.

This book performs several valuable services. Its major one, its very *raison d'être*, is to challenge a view which, after Kenneth Lynn's *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*, has been virtually official. As Lynn's title implies, this view assumes that Twain's humor was born and raised in the Southwest, among the likes of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, George W. Harris, and Joseph G. Baldwin. Sloane traces Twain's humor to a different source, the literary comedy of the Northeast, to such figures as Orpheus C. Kerr, Petroleum V. Nasby, and especially Artemus Ward, who is significant enough to get a chapter from Sloane all to himself.

Sloane is not merely concerned with Mark Twain's genealogy, however. At issue is the meaning and significance of Twain's humor, hence of Twain's career as a whole. Sloane's demonstration of his genealogy is accordingly thorough: more than fifty pages, over a quarter of the text. The Southwestern humorists, he notes, all of whom depicted a rural world, were undemocratic, unsympathetic to the common man. They made their fun at the expense of the vernacular figures they depicted. In their frame narrators they established an unvernacular elitist norm. The literary comedians, on the contrary, did not deal with disparities by dividing their narratives between an elite and a vernacular style. In their work, Sloane points out, the vernacular has the field to itself, in the figure of a single (and singular) narrator who handles disparities with deadpan irony. The literary comedians were, then, largely motivated by social ethics, and their persuasion was liberal, their norm democratic, their biggest grudge the power of the urban corporate elite. We need only cite these items to see how well they fit Twain, as characteristically as his white suits.

Sloane's book performs another service by examining Twain's career in terms of his development of literary comedy, demonstrating thereby a real unity in all of Twain's bewildering variety. He shows us how Twain kept realizing, in a single figure or voice, the many different posssibilities inherent in literary comedy. He managed as no one before him had to evolve a voice rich and flexible enough to handle sustained narrative and finally the novel form itself. Thus Sloane helps us appreciate continuity in Twain's career as a whole and between individual discrete works.

Sloane's thesis is incisive enough to enable him not only to perceive important connections between works, but also to examine anew the energy and form of individual works. In the tradition of the novel, for instance, Huck Finn was

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something new, but in the tradition of literary comedy, Sloane demonstrates, he was a familiar figure, the deadpan ironist on stage, at work. But in the figure of Huck the literary comedian becomes "a visionary hero," and that, Sloane argues, constitutes his genuine originality. Thus Sloane raises the issue—unresolvable, finally, but crucial—of the extent of Huck's self-consciousness, the actual nature of his innocence. He helps us realize how ambiguous a character Huck is. With his thesis Sloane is also able to show us—to cite only one other instance—how Hank Morgan is not an ass who stumbled into a novel, but rather is a consummation of Twain's evolution as a literary comedian. His self-contradictions are hereby present and accounted for: they amount to the different offices which literary comedy traditionally served—"political argument, economic reasoning, professional ethics, comic humanism, and literary burlesque"—but in Twain's hands put to more serious work, a critique of modern democratic civilization itself, and ending up, significantly enough, with an admission of that civilization's futility. Sloane argues in effect that the novel's failure, as most critics construe it, is actually its success: the novel is about the failure of the ethos implied in literary comedy and embodied in the person of Hank Morgan. It is an interesting argument.

Sloane examines in detail a number of other works: *The Gilded Age*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *The American Claimant*, and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. His approach is chronological, starting with Twain's journalism, and his omissions are easily defensible, with one exception. He does not go beyond *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which means he neglects *The Mysterious Stranger*. To be sure, *The Mysterious Stranger* was never finished, but it is an important document nonetheless, and Satan, though he is not the narrator, is nevertheless a character we could reasonably call a literary comedian. But his type of humor is different from that defined by Sloane, and that difference may account for his omission. For Satan is strictly antithetical, anti-ethical, anti-egaliterian, anti-ideal, anti-empirical, and anti-historical. He reminds one, in many ways, of the vernacular figures of the Southwestern humorists, though he does not speak in dialect. But he did not arise *ex nihilo* in Twain's later career. For as James M. Cox has shown us (in *The Fate of Humor*), there was something anti-ethical in Twain's humor all along, indeed, there is something anti-ethical, anti-serious, in the nature of humor as such. Sloane acknowledges Cox, but he does not give Cox's thesis sufficient attention. He insists too strictly, too narrowly on his own, and at times it misleads him. Twain enjoyed blowing ethics to bits at least as much as he liked to preach. In his deep heart's core there was anarchy as well as a democratic ideal. His later nihilism and despair did not emerge in spite of the values implicit in his humor, as Sloane thinks, but as a direct result of realizing those values.

At other times Sloane's thesis, or more precisely his focus, keeps him from seeing certain important issues implicit in his discussion, issues that deserve explicit consideration. Are literary comedy and sustained narrative, for instance, truly compatible? To understand that Hank Morgan is a literary comedian is genuinely helpful, but I for one cannot help but think that therein, precisely lies his weakness as a narrator/protagonist of and in the novel. A literary comedian, in other words, may by nature be fit only for one-night stands, not

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for the extended engagements required by the novel. Perhaps, however, the two modes can live successfully together in the same structure. The issue needs thinking about. So does the issue of humor. Perhaps there are different kinds of humor—essentially different—and perhaps Twain practiced both (or all three, or four, as the case may be). Hence, it may be, the richness of his humor—the play of Southwest and Northeast off against one another—and hence too the self-divisions that would not, finally, let him stand on any faith or hope.

These are a couple of important issues concerning which Sloane makes assumptions rather than examinations. But he does raise the issues, and thus he not only defines a valid perspective for regarding Twain, he provokes thought that goes beyond his own discussion.

JEFFREY L. DUNCAN

Eastern Michigan University

Dos Passos: Artist as American by Linda W. Wagner. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979. Pp. xiv + 220. $14.95.

Professor Wagner's study of Dos Passos is balanced, sane, modest, learned, appreciative, and brief. Therein is an acomplishment which is more remarkable than at first might be recognized, for the abiding quality of Dos Passos' own accomplishment peculiarly evades assessment, despite all of the plain-speaking that is in it and despite all of the sprawl.

It is to be recalled that Dos Passos was once a contemporary master and that he was not only acclaimed but was also informative. In a period which was committed to the idea that "both politics and the arts must derive their power from a common center of energy"—the phrase, astonishingly, is Allen Tate's—Dos Passos seemed, better than anyone else, to have created the shapes appropriate to the central energy. It helped also, of course, that in the 1930's his political attitudes were generally perceived to be correct, although perhaps a little bit ornery on the side of artistic freedom. All of that was long ago, however. Dos Passos continued to write, voluminously, to the end in 1970, and he did not change, but the times did, and the enterprise which had combined a political and a literary radicalism into a single expression, by the 1950's and 1960's came to seem to be the utterest conservatism. What had been an effort towards discovering a new and liberating version of the American tradition was an antiquarian crotchetiness. Where once the villains in Dos Passos' America had been the Military, or Andrew Carnegie, or Frederick Taylor (of the Taylor Plan), the tyrants who suppressed individual liberties were, latterly, bureaucrats of the mode of Roosevelt's New Deal, and Roosevelt himself, in the *District of Columbia* trilogy, and the union movement as it had become Big Labor, in *Midcentury*. The message was what it had been—"The theme is freedom," as Professor Wagner says, quoting Dos Passos—and the message was not necessarily unwelcome, but it lacked the context of a broad, sympathetic, and somewhat organized movement. Lacking such, there was no longer much of a definable urgency in the presence of Dos Passos.

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And now to look upon the enormous amount of the work would seem to constitute either an invitation to scholarship in the most dreary meaning of the word, or an invitation to polemical celebration by subtraction—at one point or another, according to individual bias, he was one of us—or the task would seem to prescribe puffery. But Dos Passos' politics at every major point is lacking in sectarian purity, and puffery is likely to be just that because in truth not all of the approximately fifty books are wonderful, and Dos Passos did not write a Balzacian or Faulknerian kind of opus in which the pieces might be seen to be fitted intricately each to each to create a grand and singular design, nor was Dos Passos even in the major moments a powerful originator of forms and language. There is nothing in the sometimes celebrated technical devices of *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.* which Dos Passos could not have picked up from others among his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, notably—of course—Joyce. He was, rather, an ambitious, fluent, and skillful adapter of forms and language.

In her introduction Professor Wagner says that "The question today, critically, should be why Dos Passos' very important role in the development of modern American fiction need be considered with any tinge of apology," and that question, wistful-bold as it is and giving up so much ground as it does, does have a pertinence. It is by no means a matter of certainty that Dos Passos has indeed had any continuous "very important" role as an American literary influence. Professor Wagner names three putative recipients of the influence: Günter Grass, E. L. Doctorow, and Norman Mailer. But Grass (disregarding the fact that Danzig is not an American town) obviously is beholden to many teachers and to Dos Passos, if at all, much less than, say, to Dante; Doctorow's technique of working real names from the recent past into narrative fiction—presumably that is what Professor Wagner is referring to—has many modern sources (Joyce, again, preeminently); and, as for Mailer, it was only in the first novel that he showed a clear indebtedness to Dos Passos, and the great thing about Mailer is that formally every one of his novels has been a fresh beginning. But the "tinge of apology" which any serious discussions of Dos Passos would in fact seem to entail, in its turn, leads to a large problem, the only answer to which probably is grace and flexibility.

There are other American writers approximately of Dos Passos' generation who are much like Dos Passos. Archibald MacLeish is one. Carl Sandburg is perhaps another. These are men who had virtues in such abundance that attention would seem to be compulsory. As writers they were, persistently, very shrewd and very adept and always at least moderately inventive, and they were ambitious in the very best sense: they were writers first of all. When other blooming geniuses faded, they went on. At the same time they were, at least in what they revealed in their writing, wonderfully decent men for whom literature was a way of doing good. Given some access in each instance to some special materials of passion—in Dos Passos' case there was the matter of his peculiar family situation, his position as a kind of royal bastard—they mostly chose breadth and citizenship. Their careers are acknowledgedly monumental while the sum of what they actually wrote is curiously obscure.

In fact Professor Wagner reads her way through Dos Passos in shiftingly various ways. She sometimes refers to biography. She traces connections be-

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tween earlier and later characters in the novels, although she does not press a case for a single opus. She does stylistic analysis and technical analysis. Sometimes she faults Dos Passos, especially for his failures to provide his characters with greater psychological depth. Sometimes she does contextual analysis. But that kind of inflection of critical attitudes would seem to be mandated if the books are at all to be made freshly apprehensible. Professor Wagner ends by agreeing with someone else that Dos Passos was fundamentally "a good man." Amen to that, and a good man is hard to find.

MARCUS KLEIN

State University of New York at Buffalo

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CRITICISM

a quarterly for literature and the arts

volume XXII, number 2 · spring 1980

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KENNETH DAUBER*

American Culture as Genre

"In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?" Thus Sidney Smith in a famous piece in the *Edinburgh Review*. But in the four quarters of the globe, who, we should add, writes one? For reading implies writing, and if we assume, outside America, an audience with competence to *receive* American works, ought we not, similarly, assume an outside authorship capable of *producing* them? Despite the obvious shambles such a notion makes of national security and defensible boundaries, I suggest it in all seriousness. For investigators of American works have for too long taken for granted the priority of "American" to "work." To speak of the American novel, for example, to which the attention of most literary critics has been directed, it has always been assumed that America is, as it were, the cause of its novels, that insofar as the American novel is a unique genre, it reflects the particularities of a unique culture. And yet the very idea of genre, cutting, as it does, across narrow notions of nationalism, substituting blatantly literary for cultural considerations, would seem to suggest a far more complicated relationship. What do students of literature mean by "American" in the phrase "American novel," and is it not possible they mean something literary equally with something cultural, something generic which *is* culture? Should not literary critics, in their investigation of national literatures, forego their reliance on traditional terms for defining nationality and provide their own, perhaps more fundamental, terms, instead?

This needs further explaining, of course, though that it does must be our point of departure. For it is a curious fact of the discipline of literary criticism that its practitioners do not really suppose that they practice a discipline. The usual status accorded literary criticism is secondary. As it is most widely carried on today, it is what happens after the results of researches in other disciplines are already in. It is a disposition of the historical or psychological or sociological facts, a final judging of them, perhaps, but which, for the sake of having the last word, trades in its priority, its potential for making itself founding

* Kenneth Dauber, the author of *Rediscovering Hawthorne*, is an Associate Professor of English at SUNY-Buffalo. This essay was originally presented at a symposium on literary genres sponsored by Wayne State University.

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for the fields on which it now depends. Literary critics have seen literary criticism as a thinking about things of a specialized kind. But they have thereby overlooked its nature as a special kind of thinking, as a model, in fact, of thinking, that goes on outside literary criticism, in other disciplines as well, and which may therefore be at the very root of discipline, and indeed, of knowledge, formation.

The situation of literary criticism is not unlike that of a sister discipline, linguistics, some fifty years ago. Secondary or not even, too, defined as a subject matter rather than as a characteristic procedure, it was regenerated by Saussure and others. It was conceived as the study of systems of signification and as such extended to literature, anthropology, psychology, reinterpreting those disciplines as particular manifestations of a more general semiological field to which linguists, before all others, had access. Similarly for literary criticism. Literary criticism is no more than reading. But reading, as we have seen, implies writing, so that intensive study by literary critics of what it is they do would mean investigating the special compact between reader and writer. It would mean engaging that decision to dispose themselves toward each other, that agreement to talk that establishes what they will talk about, and that logically, perhaps even actually, precedes the history or sociology, the culture as a whole, which thereby only *becomes* their subject matter. At the origin of any discourse is the reading and writing which authorizes it. Reading and writing are what delimit particular branches of thinking. Literature is a model of reading and writing. And American literature, I would claim, is a model of models. It makes manifest what is implicit in other literatures. It reveals that literature is inescapably the business of reading and writing and thus the basis of a general *rhetorical* field to which *literary critics*, before all others, have access.

Now to some extent, this has long been recognized. Henry James' well known remarks on the difficulty of American writers who had to write depending on "No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name," is a warning against going to American culture for an explanation of American writing. "One might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left.... No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy... no great universities, nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Har-

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row."[1] The American writer, James seems to be saying, had hardly anything to write about. Clearly, at a literal level, this is an absurd position. But James means by it, I think, that it is not *what* in this world the American writer represents, but the character of his decision *to* represent, that is the important thing about him. For despite the labor of American historians, for that matter even literary historians, to elaborate the cultural density of early America, American art, at least the American novel, no matter how complex or how strong, simply does not seem to derive its interest from referring to it. We call American novels "romances," as if to deny their basis in representation altogether. And, indeed, their manifest power has so resisted the analyses of non-literary disciplines that the two central questions asked from the very beginning about them, which is the "first," and what is the "great," American novel, not only have not been answered definitively, but have received answers that fail spectacularly.

Consider "which is the first American novel." This is a question radically unlike "which is the first English novel," say. For the English question is about the origin of a particular genre within literature as a whole. It seeks to differentiate novels from other forms of writing, and it never raises questions about writing in general. Assuming, as it does, a writing tradition, a literature which, indeed, is caused by culture, it posits some sort of cultural intervention to explain "the rise of the novel" almost as a matter of course. The growth of the bourgeoisie, the increase of leisure among women, the waning of religious enthusiasm, all of these made the novel possible. But the possibility that "the rise of the novel," or at least the social bond of novel writers and readers, their suspension of faith of one kind for faith in each other, their separation of a literary, if not leisure, space from the spaces of other transactions, is itself the model of a changed cultural organization is only seldom raised. "Which is the first *American* novel," however, is a question precisely about the nature of literature. For before the American novel is nothing at all, and a proper attempt to answer the question must, therefore, consider the consequences to culture of a phenomenon which has not previously existed, the new habit of mind it implies, and even the kind of culture it may, therefore, create.

[1] "Hawthorne," in *The Shock of Recognition*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: Modern Library, 1943), p. 460.

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We may look at Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, for example, "the first book by an American to move American readers," as Leslie Fiedler has put it.[2] Now Susanna Rowson was an Englishwoman living in England when she wrote *Charlotte Temple*, and the novel's characters and the setting of most of its action are English. The real claim for the book as American seems to rest, accordingly, on Rowson's later career, her emigration to America and the works she produced there. These works are American by virtue of an unassailably American personal and publishing history. And yet, since the relation of *Charlotte Temple* to them is a matter of formal judgment, the claim for *Charlotte* as first, though ostensibly historical is actually aesthetic, or, rather, a muddled and unconvincing mixture of the two.

Similarly, there is William Williams' recently uncovered *Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman*, "in point of *composition*... very probably America's first novel," in David Dickason's view.[3] But *Penrose*, first published in London, was written by a man who lived his last as well as his first years in England, and the setting of most of *its* action is the Caribbean. The claim for *Penrose's* Americanness, rather, would seem to rest, again, on an unacknowledged formal valuation. As a sea story, it is something like *Moby-Dick* or *Two Years before the Mast*, books whose Americanness we would not think of questioning—once more, a claim presumably historical, but really aesthetic and, in any case, impossible to credit.

The problem in both cases is a definition of history which is not from the start aesthetic. Nor do I mean simply the reverse, that we must define America as the development of its novels. Rather, neither America nor novel exists as an independent entity. Formal no more than historical inquiries will do, and this accounts for the persistence of the second question, what is the "great" American novel.

This is a question not even asked in England, and again, because we assume, in England, a writing tradition which would make it unnecessary. There are many great English novels. There is room for a variety of kinds of greatnesses, for many forms representing

[2] *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 93.

[3] Introduction to *Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman*, by William Williams (Bloomington: Indiana Unvi. Press, 1969), p. 13.

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many meaningful cultural experiences. But the difficulty of whether, let alone when, an American tradition begins, produces a quest for a novel which, by its success, would create America *as* meaningful. The search for the great American novel is the search for that novel whose formal properties are sufficiently marked to give shape to America itself.

Once this is said, however, new trouble begins. For the formal property most characteristic of American novels is, and notoriously, their shapelessness. The arbitrary shifts in point of view as in Melville, the comic endings incommensurate with tragic middles as in Hawthorne, the indecisive waverings between kinds of plots as in Cooper, are certainly marked but hardly valuable, let alone value making. They cannot give America anything more than it already has. And, indeed, American fiction's instability, its openness, would seem to be a transparent reflection of that openness of American culture to which James pointed. Form is just another version of content, and the quest for an aesthetic standard is thus but the quest for the cultural standard it would manifest. Historical analysis, here, masquerades as aesthetic analysis, a confusion but of the opposite sort encountered in studies of *Charlotte Temple*, and which only the sort of rhetorical inquiry, the investigation of writing and reading suggested earlier, can help us disentangle.

What I propose, accordingly, is that the great American novel is but the first American novel seen from another perspective. Or, rather, in place of either one, we must search for that activity, that consent of reader with writer, in which both American history and American aesthetics might be said to originate. The great American novel is what would authorize a new, distinctively American, writing. It would be precisely a beginning, a first. But returning itself to that communal consent from which its authority is, in its own turn, derived, it would dissolve its formal self and take itself out of history. Forms, particular novels, would be but provisional actualizations, the meetings of consent with history. History, prior to consent in fact, would lose its priority in meaning, becoming meaningful but as accommodated *into* form. The great American novel as reading and writing is thus the ultimate object of American literary criticism. It is the beginning and culmination of American form, of American content, of American culture itself.

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The readings of America that follow in practice from such a notion as I have been outlining thus far will be elaborated shortly. But some general consequences might first, briefly, be discussed. A study of America as reading and writing is a profoundly demystifying project. It attacks teleological notions of American history, returning historical developments to a covenant which is always past. It limits even the meaningfulness of American texts, inscribing them within a founding agreement about textuality that makes them always provisional. As a development from consent, the history of America would be no unfolding of some mythic design, its citizens the descendants of no religious or romantic community at the cutting edge of some visionary progress. Rather, America would be redefined as irreducibly pluralistic—despite its Puritan origins, as secular from the start. Its literature would be self limiting rather than scriptural, its work but words. Even its ideology would be merely functional, for its beliefs would be rather chosen than given. America would be subject to will. No one would be born an American, but would become American by adopting America. America would be that country, above all others, composed of self-conscious writers and readers, an immigrant rather than autochthonous populace, never native, even, perhaps, expatriate, and writing as well as reading, as we proposed at the beginning of this essay, always outside America's merely geographical or historical boundaries.

Let us return to Susanna Rowson, to study America as genre in greater detail. As we have observed, the claim for her work's Americanness is problematic. But we can see that its problems are a consequence not of its history or of its author's birthplace, but of its uncertain relation to reading and writing, its failure to define itself as within a rhetorical field, though it moves in that direction. Indeed, to uncover the problematical rhetoricity of *Charlotte Temple* is to uncover the problematic of America itself as it struggles to define its own Americanness in the years just following its political independence.

Now the genre of *Charlotte Temple* is hardly remarkable. The book is one more tale of seduction, degradation, and death of the sort popular in England and America, based ultimately on Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Similarly, for the national material: part of the action takes place, as we noted, in the United States, but Rowson

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is so little interested in local color or manners that England and America are indistinguishable except in name. There is, however, a peculiar failure of authoritativeness, more than simple amateurishness, that might be seen as pre-American in that it seems to result from the absence of that established tradition of writing which English novelists of however little accomplishment always assumed. "It would be useless to repeat the conversation that here ensued; suffice it to say, that Montraville used every argument that had formerly been successful, Charlotte's resolution began to waver, and he drew her almost imperceptibly toward the chaise."[4] This is a sort of talking of the novel rather than a writing of it. The drama, the dialogue are not rendered, but referred to. The novel has not yet achieved the authority of novel-hood. It cannot produce realities itself, but must assume a reality outside, instead. Accordingly, to establish it more securely, Rowson must invent it from the ground up, must create for it a basis in rhetoric, in consent, by appealing to the reader openly, unabashedly:

> But perhaps your gay hearts would rather follow the fortunate Mrs. Crayton through the scenes of pleasure and dissipation in which she was engaged, than listen to the complaints and miseries of Charlotte. I will for once oblige you; I will for once follow her to midnight revels, balls, and scenes of gaiety, for in such was she constantly engaged. (p. 140)

In effect, the reader is to write the story, though admittedly this is hardly more than a pretense. The functional purpose of this passage is largely as a narrative transition, a way of passing from one scene to the next. And yet, originating as a simple formal device, remaining, indeed, half formal through the length of *Charlotte Temple*, rhetorical appeal will come to be the very basis of the novel in America, the ground on which it stands.

Rowson, of course, cannot go further than she does. She wrote, perhaps, too early in our history. Or, perhaps, she was too wise or too timid to hazard herself, her privileges as author, to a readership likely to make either too many or too few demands on her. Certainly, she understood well the dangers of readers and struggles with them

[4] *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth*, ed. Clara M. Kirk and Rudolf Kirk (New York: Twayne, 1954), p. 82. Subsequent references are to this edition.

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throughout the book. The readership may be recalcitrant. It is flighty and thinks the story should be less pious than it is. It is Puritanical and thinks stories of all kinds are bad influences. It will not give itself over to the novelist, keeps asking why it should believe such stuff, anyway, and must constantly, in passages in virtually every chapter, be berated for its pigheadedness in raising objections at every turn. "I hope, Sir, your prejudices are now removed in regard to the probability of my story? Oh they are. Well then, with your leave, I will proceed" (p. 148). But even worse, it may give itself over too wholeheartedly. It may ask the writer to give herself over and thus, ultimately, to lose herself. It may have too much "sympathy," as William Hill Brown, another first American novelist, called it in *The Power of Sympathy*. For in sympathy, in the consent of reader and writer to each other and to the work they produce, is a loss of control, a loss of standing, a loss of that identity which rests in history rather than in reading and writing and which only a genuinely American book is capable of eliciting. As we have said, the great American novel keeps dissolving out of form and out of history into the consent which authorizes it. But in return, its authors are dissolved into their activity of consenting, becoming authors but in an action which is precisely a renunciation of such actions as, else, they would be free to perform. "But as you have led to the subject, I think we may as well return to the distressed Charlotte and not like the unfeeling Mrs. Crayton shut our hearts to the call of humanity" (p. 141). Again, we have rhetoric as a formal device, perhaps, but its potential here is coercive. It fights us; it takes us against our wills. It removes us from that actuality in which, otherwise, we are and are too secure in being, and, in fact, it pushes us into what, accordingly, is resisted with considerable strength.

Though we would not have expected it, though it makes no sense if we regard the genres of *Charlotte Temple* as a conventional "novel of sentiment," there appears in the book a kind of reserve, a refusal to participate in the events represented, that is striking and otherwise hard to explain. Despite its pathetic trappings, the expected handkerchief waving, the too ready tears, the book's language is remarkably *not* overwrought. Its style, for this sort of thing, is almost, we should say, chaste. It is as if Charlotte, whom the sentimental, by softening, would enable us to take in, is so frighteningly appealing that she must forcibly be walled out. Charlotte is not, finally, us, the

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book tells us. Indeed Charlotte was a real person. *Charlotte Temple*, as the subtitle proclaims, is "A Tale of Truth," and truth, almost defined as rhetorical, is finally defined as historical. What Rowson says of Mrs. Beauchamp, Charlotte's friend in her troubles, is ultimately true of Rowson and her audience as well: she "returned home with a heart oppressed with many painful sensations, but yet rendered easy by the reflection that she had performed her duty towards a distressed fellow creature" (p. 156). It is duty that saves us from the anguish of sympathy, the certainty of traditional moral and religious obligations that prevents us from having to define ourselves *by* ourselves. *Charlotte Temple* is not yet an American novel because it refuses to take on the obligations of the rhetorical revolution it comes so close to initiating. It goes so far along the rhetorical path as to ask the reader for his assent to its truth. But it refuses to admit that assent would produce truth. Its shifting between one and the other, the dialectic of its concerns, lies at the heart of such a richly ambiguous statement as "We hold these truths to be self evident," moving between the tradition implicit in "self evident" and the authorizing consent of "We hold." In history its analogue would be the wavering of America between European-style nationalism and the newly emerging federalism. In legal philosophy it would be the debate between common and constitutional law. But it is, at bottom, *Charlotte Temple* that offers the key to unlock the materials of such disciplines as history and legal philosophy, the rhetoric that literary criticism must take as its object.

Accordingly, we may turn to the rhetoric of another American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne, for insight into the generic situation of culture in the next, more completely American century. Hawthorne's appeals to his audience are well known. In a story such as "Wakefield," where he invites the reader "to ramble with me through the twenty years of Wakefield's vagary," he continues Rowson's device of letting the reader be the writer. Or "If the reader choose, let him do his own meditation." [5] Like Rowson, Hawthorne, too, knows the difficulties he is likely to encounter from readers. But more secure with rhetoricity as a principle, accepting it, as it were, from the start, as the foundation of his writing, he can meet, with more even a

[5] *Twice-told Tales, Centenary Edition* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1974), IX, 131. Subsequent references are to this edition.

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temper, the reader's stubborn insistences and evasions. Does his audience expect some neatly packaged lesson at the end of the novel? "Not to be deficient, in this particular, the Author has provided himself with a moral" (II, 2). Has it ceased to be interested in what Hawthorne wishes to say? Can Hawthorne "have little heart or confidence... to presume upon the existence of that friend or friends, that unseen brother of the soul, whose apprehensive sympathy has so often encouraged me"? No matter, for "I stand upon ceremony, now" (IV, 2), and the ceremony of sympathy is sufficiently well established. Hawthorne, everywhere, is inside rhetoricity. He commits himself to it wholeheartedly. He takes on the burdens Rowson was incapable of taking on, and his career may be said to develop from the moment of commitment.

For twelve years after college, Hawthorne lived his life in the attic of his mother's house, writing, revising, even publishing, but always anonymously or under an assumed name. We might wish to see him as a visionary poet, a transcendentalist, perhaps, communing with his muse, as early neo-romantic aestheticians did. Or we might normalize him by pointing to his summer trips through the countryside and the New England landscape and atmosphere represented in his early stories, as more recent historians have. But the most startling fact of those years is the abrupt, even deliberate way in which Hawthorne terminated them. By sheer act of will, as it seems, he came down to the world, married, and opened himself to the public by signing his works with a name, his name, but for the ever so slight, though significant, difference of an added letter, "w." Sloughing off his old solitary identity, he adopts a new social one. Or better, if we prefer not to see him as solitary, rejecting his Hathorne-ness, his nationality which was his by birth, by a Puritan ancestry going back to the Salem witch trials, he recreates it as an act of publication, as a disposition toward others who, by accepting him, create a nation. Society, Hawthorne's career seems to say, is never what is given, but is always, rather, what is made. It is founded on deliberation, on what we have called consent, so that even the world of Hawthorne's books, his pictures of early and present day America, *is* his world only because he has agreed with his readers to make it so.

Problems still remain. The shift into rhetoricity which Hawthorne accomplished does not so much resolve the dialectic of *Charlotte*

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Temple as recast it at a new level. Indeed, the opposition of objectivity and rhetoricity in the early book becomes, in Hawthorne, but the opposition of a rhetoric of objectivity and a rhetoric of rhetoricity. The work, born of consent, yet escapes it. Formalizing reading and writing, as we have said the work does, it succumbs to an inertia of form and refuses to dissolve itself back into reading and writing. It, as it were, scripturalizes itself, so that the ideology it expresses, once merely functional, becomes, again, theological. How can Hawthorne arrest the inevitable progress of *The Scarlet Letter*? How can he prevent what happens to Hester Prynne, what happens to her because he and his readers believe that morally, historically, culturally it *must* happen? "The Custom-House" preface is an attempt. Appealing to the reader once more, excusing himself for intruding when he has already committed himself to the story proper, he tries to rewrite *The Scarlet Letter* at a more intimate level. For Dimmesdale's mixed feelings for Boston he gives us his own for Salem, for the love-hate relationship of Hester with the Puritan magistrates his own relationship with the old soldiers of the Custom-House. Most of all, allowing "an autobiographical impulse... [to] have taken possession of me, in addressing the public" (I, 3), he turns the whole complex product over to his "indulgent reader," as he calls him, converting *The Scarlet Letter's* famous ambiguity into ambivalence, its impersonal formulation of a difficult issue into a matter of "sympathy" once more. In the argument of "The Custom-House" with *The Scarlet Letter* is the dialectic at the heart of the debate over Jacksonian democracy, a kind of demagogic appeal to recreate once more a society which would, however, stand as already created, an insistence on returning to the people what the people, having already consented to, would else be bound by. It is a sort of loose constructionism versus strict constructionism. But it is, even more than in Rowson, a dialectic that is foremost a matter of rhetoric, although one which Hawthorne, too, never quite managed to his satisfaction.

At the end of his life, returning from a consulship in England to pick up again his American career, Hawthorne buries himself in another attic, searching for a new consent that would give his work a new start. The unfinished manuscripts he left are painful to read. Filled with images, bloody footprints and locked cabinets, and with notes to himself asking what he might mean by them, they reveal an

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identity that cannot even consent to itself. It is as if, withdrawing back to the security of that first identity that was his, that solitary or historically founded identity he owned before writing, he found that the difficulties of writing had followed him and would no longer leave him alone. Publicly he remained silent, outside rhetoric. It was left to Herman Melville to rhetoricize silence itself, defining an America at the extreme boundary of that social consent which would be destroyed utterly in the Civil War.

Melville, then, carries the dialectic of America which we have presented so far to its generic end. He begins where Hawthorne had stopped. He seems, at the very start of his career, to have defined for himself that identity in reading and writing that took Hawthorne twelve years of meditation to establish and the rest of a life of hard labor to maintain. Melville's first books, *Typee* and *Omoo*, were his life, his adventures at sea, and his life was an immediate critical success. We may not wish to believe him, may even have some historical evidence to the contrary, but Melville always claimed those books were true, as if the rhetoric of their composition, the decorums of reader expectation to which they successfully played, made his living a function of his writing. Melville's first novels *were* the great American novel, which is to say they were no novels at all, neither form nor content, but a mode of interrelationship, a consent as it were always already given, the principle of all that he was or ever wanted to be. Before consent was neither solitude nor ancestry to weigh upon him. Before consent was nothing at all. Defining himself, his only self, as a writer appealing to his readers, he approached rhetoricity almost as the natural condition of his existence.

No more than Hawthorne's determined consent, however, did Melville's "natural" consent prove secure. Accordingly, when it began to waver, absolutely everything was at risk, and saving everything thus constitutes the curve of Melville's career. The problem, once more, takes the shape of the opposition to consent of objectivity. But it is not the objectivity of simple history, as in Rowson, nor yet of a rhetoric turned objective, as in Hawthorne, that is here at issue. Within rhetoricity so firmly, almost so naturally, as we have said, Melville's work may never become scripturalized. But it may become simply dead, a formalization of consent no longer meant: empty, a form and a form only. Such a form is the expression of negative consent. It is the actualization no longer of community but of the failure to keep

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community alive. Rhetoricity is turned on its head. Writer and reader remain defined by their writing and reading. They have no identity prior to writing and reading to which they may return. But the work they write and read would thus destroy them, would decreate the author's authority over it and the reader's ability to comprehend it. Melville's books, as most critics hold, never, even at their best, tightly controlled, get more and more disjointed as his career continues. From the epic inclusiveness of *Moby-Dick* they descend to the farcical disproportionality of *Pierre*, the aimless fragmentation of *The Confidence-Man*, and, finally, to the forty years of silence before his death, in which Melville wrote virtually nothing. But that "descent," we may now understand, is the result not of a loss of vision or of subject matter or even of personal or communal hope, as is sometimes asserted, but of Melville's heroic attempt to save writing and reading from the form that is written and read, to save himself as writer and his audience as readers from a work into which they were rapidly disappearing.

We may begin in *Moby-Dick* and the communality on its opening, "Call me Ishmael." Writer and reader, disposing themselves toward each other in the first sentence, proceed to build their universe. They create a work, the formalization of a consent so strong it keeps returning to consent. This is the epic quality of *Moby-Dick*, its comprehensiveness, which proceeds not so much from its content, its numerous catalogues, for example, as from its diffusion beyond the boundaries of any catalogue, its existence as the activity of cataloguing, captured only momentarily in the form of a novel. Only six months later, however, in *Pierre*, everything has changed. It is as if, achieving all it could achieve in a positive direction, writing and reading now begin to reverse course. R. P. Blackmur, in a famous essay, has spoken of what he calls the "putative statement" of *Pierre*, its practice of not describing events in such a way as to produce any emotion, but of telling us what the emotion we are supposed to have is.[6] He considers this Melville's failure, his inability to impress himself upon his text—in our terms, to dissolve his text in the activity of text creation. But properly, we should see it as a significant achievement, Melville's attempt, based on his own recognition of that inability, to separate

[6] "The Craft of Herman Melville: A Putative Statement," in *The Lion and the Honeycomb: Essays in Solicitude and Critique* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), pp. 124-44.

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creation *from* the text in which it usually results. By the time of *The Confidence-Man*, we get a work almost not created, fragments neither written nor able to be read, left to stand, as it were, on their own. And yet, in the context of Melville's career as a whole, *The Confidence-Man*, I believe, is not something that happens *to* him, but something he does. For as an act he performs, a piece of non-writing considered from the point of view *of* writing, it negates its negativity. It is the sign of continuing rhetoricity going on outside it, of rhetoric in the absence of texts. It suggests the possibility of writing in a new mode, of writing, but no thing, no form, writing silence itself.

Melville does not, in the next forty years, like Hawthorne, *retreat* into silence. He embraces it, as it were, authors it, defining even non-production as within a rhetorical frame. His relationship with his readers continues. He never does give up that consent which, as always, we have said, remained his. Rather, as he himself becomes quieter and quieter, so the readership he addresses is less and less able to hear. The conventional family and benefactors to whom *Typee* and *Omoo* were dedicated give way, in *Pierre*, to a mountain and, in the silence itself, we may presume, to an audience but as deaf as he is dumb. Here is the last possible community of consent before the emergence in America of a community of constraint. It is the consent of a culture, as Hawthorne said of Melville, which had "pretty much made up its mind to be annihilated." I would go so far as to say that Melville thus predicts the Civil War and that, as a result, once again, as in Rowson or in Hawthorne, whatever the historical or sociological causes of a great cultural event that social science is likely to uncover, literary criticism, by revealing its rhetorical structure, helps us understand it at its most fundamental level.

We may, accordingly, turn to Melville's last work, *Billy Budd*, the manuscript found in his desk after his death, for one final cultural revelation. After the Civil War, as is well known, literature in America enters a phase called "realism." Now it is usual for a traditional criticism, proceeding from the "facts" expounded in historical analysis, to explain literary realism as a hard-nosed view of the world forced upon Americans by the brute reality of the Civil War. Actually, however, like the Civil War, brute reality itself, *Billy Budd* shows us, is rather the creation of Americans reading and writing after annihilation. *Billy Budd* is a terribly calm work, for all its complexity—the great moral and philosophical issues it raises—clear and shockingly free

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of that passionate pleading we are used to from *Typee* on. As we might have expected, given Melville's progress, the work no longer seems to need him to write it. But no longer able to sustain the writing of silence, he seems to need *it*. *Billy Budd* is in control of things, and play with its parameters as he does, speculate, philosophize, present alternatives, Melville is drawn always back to it, constrained by it, defining himself by his inability to *re*define it. To write after the kind of negative consent Melville has seen, he seems to be telling us, is to give *up* control. To continue to read is to consent to the irrelevance of one's consenting. The world that follows is a world of social Darwinism, laissez-faire capitalism, industrialism, the surrender of men to events, the promotion of history and culture *to* priority over reading and writing. But the American novel may no longer, in such a world, *be* "American," American culture no longer remain generic. These possibilities need to be developed further.

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W. DAVID SHAW*

The Agnostic Imagination in Victorian Poetry

The Evangelical typology which teaches Ruskin in his youth to read the signs of nature as a divinely inscribed text slowly relaxes its hold on the Victorian imagination. The Victorian poet can no longer assume a Wordsworthian language of nature, in which the world of things leads a double life as object and sign. In this paper I explore the nature of a new agnostic imagination. I concentrate upon the implications for language of H. L. Mansel's agnostic theology, and upon the impact of agnostic thought on the language of Arnold, Clough, and Hopkins.

In Victorian poetry we enter a new firmament of equivocal symbolism, constructed over the lovely ruins of an older analogical tradition. Because in *Idylls of the King* we inhabit the world, not just of Malory, but of agnostic thinkers like H. L. Mansel and Herbert Spencer, we are continually discovering how shadowy and precarious are the visionary enterprises of a Galahad or Percivale. Without the stability of a sacramental symbolism, founded on the orders of nature and grace as in *The Faerie Queene*, Tennyson's Arthurian firmament falls apart into fragments: the centre will not hold. Increasingly, Tennyson's poetry presents the spectacle of analogical symbol dissolving into mere extrinsic token or equivocal sign.

In "The Vision of Sin," for example, where Tennyson appears to share the belief of Mansel and Spencer that words about the Absolute betray absolutely, the rolling echoes of the answer from the summit, like the inhuman, rosy quiverings of the Holy Grail, present God obliquely, in a "tongue no man could understand" (l. 122). Partly as a result of Tennyson's growing interest in Oriental mysticism, the analogical participation of the natural order in the divine continues to fade, until the world itself threatens to dissolve in the cold and imageless void, "The Abysm of all Abysms" ("The Ancient Sage," l. 40). Because God's nature remains profoundly hidden, "unconceivably"

* W. David Shaw, Professor of English at the University of Toronto, is the author of books on Browning and Tennyson. He is currently at work on a study of Victorian theory.

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itself (as Tennyson affirms in "De Profundis," l. 48), the predicates of our logic, the words which are the symbols of our thought, remain mere "shadows" or equivocations—the symbolic fictions of which Spencer speaks, when trying to conceive the ultimate ideas of science and religion. In "The Ancient Sage" and "The Holy Grail," analogical activity is superseded by the poignant loveliness of something very near, the immanence of God, and by something very far off, too, something faint and irretrievable. In Tennyson's precarious inner awareness both of God's presence and withdrawal, the crisis of the skeptical imagination is never fully resolved, nor is the trace of an earlier sacramental tradition ever quite effaced. The "presence-absence of the trace," [1] without which language would be forbidden, carries in itself the problem of the letter and the spirit, the difficulty of expressing the divine presence, a life without difference, in mere symbolic fictions.

In Browning's poetry, too, as equivocal words briefly stabilize, before dissolving again in the chaotic flow, we catch a sound of the inarticulate murmur of the Word behind all words. *Sordello* bears the trace of some primal tongue, the memory of some language that was lost after the catastophe of Babel. But because Browning seems to forget the grammatical rules organizing words into higher units of meaning, the splintered echoes of his *Sordello* can never quite articulate the whole truth about God. Primal speech lies scattered in the shapeless sprawl of some huge linguistic ruin. As in *Paracelsus* and the later monologues, the bruit of contending voices, groping towards God through an exhausting volume of sound, seems to shut out the sound of the Logos altogether. The more incessant and voluble the poet's speech becomes, amplified as in a broadcasting megaphone, the less capable it seems of containing the Word in any single form. So mysteriously diverse and baffling are the various impulses of Browning's tongue, that there seems at times no access to the lost vulgate of God, except through the holes of ellipsis and negation that keep gaping in his poems.

For Browning the dissociation of the word from the Word generates the anguish of his late poem "Fears and Scruples," in which the darkness and unreliabilty of human speech are confirmed by the

[1] The phrase is taken from Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 71.

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skepticism of the handwriting experts. When the Higher Critics of the Bible declare that God's letters to men, far from possessing a revealed character unlike that of any later body of language, are merely apocryphal, they cast into doubt the numinous nature of God's life in language. And once words are no longer uttered by a holy tongue, the lineaments of God's grammar, previously inscribed into history, can no longer be traced. Browning is left to complain that God, like an "unseen friend," is the author of merely equivocal fables, incapable of any univocal decoding, or of any single equivalence of meaning: "He keeps absent," the poet laments, "why, I cannot think" (l. 28).

Since God is no longer manifest in the volume of nature, which has ceased to be conceived as a single, unified text, the Victorian world has lost the power of the blind De Lairesse (in Browning's *Parleyings*) to see nature transformed into myth, into a language of primal, untutored immediacy, such as was bestowed on the Apostles at Pentecost. In the Prologue to *Asolando* Browning laments the loss of that vivid Pentecostal flame which, fifty years ago, when he first saw Asolo, enabled him to decipher the characters of God in "natural objects," which "seemed to stand/Palpably fire-clothed" (ll. 24-25), a text of divine authorship.

> No mastery of mine o'er these!
> Terror with beauty, like the Bush
> Burning but unconsumed. Bend knees,
> Drop eyes to earthward! Language? Tush!
> Silence 't is awe decrees. (ll. 26-30)

In a tone of impatience and exhaustion, Browning renounces the common myopia which all language after Babel shares, and which makes silence the only access to the lost grammar, the lost "Terror with beauty," of the books of Moses.

Even when Browning develops a less equivocal theory of language, he recognizes that in trying to circumscribe the divine presence his words invariably move as in an inner labyrinth. The Epilogue to *Dramatis Personae* presents the "Dwindling into the distance" (l. 24) of the star of God's presence: and in "A Death in the Desert" the same star is brought into focus only through the reductive power of St. John's optic glass. Because words about God, in order to be authentic, must express a mystery which defies all symbolic conception (as

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agnostic thinkers like Mansel and Spencer both aver), the more our understanding of God seems to expand, the more God himself continues to recede. "As still to its asymptote speedeth the curve,/So approximates Man" ("Fust and his Friends," *Parleyings With Certain People*) to an understanding of God, with no chance that his words will catch up, until asymptote and curve meet at infinity.

Browning develops an almost obsessive awareness of the opaqueness of words. Equivocation is the paradoxical circumstance of Browning's inability to comprehend God: it is the chief influence on his language of the doctrine of imperfection, which may be construed as a continuous parable on the impossibility of closing the gap between the signified and its signifier, between God and the world. The reach of the analogical mind should exceed its grasp, "or what's a heaven for?" ("Andrea del Sarto," ll. 97-98). But except in "Saul" and *The Ring and the Book*, Browning's entry into heaven, which entails the collapse of his words for God into the fullness of the signified, seems endlessly postponed. Because the sacramental universe of Keble and the Tractarians seems shattered beyond repair, the instability of Browning's words makes it desperately difficult to sustain an analogical relation, or even a continuous commerce or exchange, between the words of man and the Word of God.

Of all the Victorians, Matthew Arnold is the most uprooted. "Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/The other powerless to be born" ("Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," ll. 85-86), he suffers most from what Lovejoy calls the "metaphysical pathos."[2] In his longing and aloneness, he is the quintessential agnostic man, a displaced person, suffering from an utter personal, moral, and historical homelessness. Like his dead brother and sister-in-law in "A Southern Night," who are buried in distant graves—the husband among "The sandy spits" and "shorelock'd lakes" (l. 1) of the Mediterranean Ocean and his wife beneath the "hoary Indian hills" (l. 73)—Arnold is displaced in time as well as space: he is metaphysically alone, no more at home in the world of ideology and values than he is in nature, which he apprehends as a waste of melancholy, sundered objects.

Arnold confronts the bleakness of death in alien lands with the

[2] Arnold loves the rites of the Carthusian monks for their sheer beauty and obscurity, for what F. O. Lovejoy calls "the loveliness of the incomprehensible."

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same funereal finality as does Tennyson in his lines "To the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava." Just as Tennyson forces himself to watch his son's coffin fall and flash in the Red Sea under a "hard Arabian moon/And alien stars" (ll. 45-46), so Arnold keeps lingering over bleak impressions of the boat that sails from India with his brother's corpse. Whereas Tennyson, in revising his elegy on Lionel, discards demonic details of "shapes, shadows" and "Black decks," Arnold, writing his elegy at a greater remove in time, cannot rid himself of nightmare memories of his brother's "glazed . . . eyes" and "wasted cheek," which, as he admits, "Possess [him] quite" (ll. 42, 44, 20). For both Tennyson and Arnold, God is an awful, inscrutable presence, whose justice Tennyson is tempted to question, before dismissing his inquisition as "Vain, vain! and—I may meet [my dead son] soon" (l. 48). This last phrase introduces the uncertainty of knowledge, and makes possible Tennyson's retreat from the unsayable meanings, hovering just beyond every apprehension of God, to the loves and memories of his last years.

Similarly, in Arnold's elegy for his brother, "A Southern Night," the moonlight setting diffuses the light, so that God, instead of disappearing into a total void, appears to veil himself in "lucent sheen" (l. 134). As the poem's maritime geography of "spits" and "lakes" dissolves "into open, moonlit sea" (ll. 1-2), stable forms melt into half-lights and shades, receding down vistas that offer no definite barrier to Arnold's sight. Even "the huge, gnarl'd olives" that "stand" like a sentry of "ghosts" before the "lovely mountain-line" (ll. 6-7) seem to be glimpsed in the very moment of disappearing. By dwelling on forms that are tremulous and fugitive, Arnold presents meanings that are unsayable, that remain tantalizingly out of sight, just beyond his power to grasp. Arnold struggles hard to bring into momentary poise the "hoary Indian hills" and the Mediterraean "brine," which pull in opposite directions, severing Arnold's brother and his wife, even in death. Only at the end of his elegy is he able to fix the graves of the dead in an immobile equilibrium, joined by an eternal tie, a common divinity, of which the mountains and the sea, formerly the estranging elements, are now the emblems.

Not until Arnold can invoke the concluding abstraction—"To that in you which is divine/They were allied" (ll. 139-40), the sea and the mountains remain utterly forbidding and austere. They gesture, equivocally, in the direction of a power Arnold cannot presume to

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fix in words. The arduous ascent of "those Indian mountains old" by the Hindu sage, "Hoar-headed, wrinkled, clad in white,/Without companion, without speech" (ll. 91, 86-87), brings a progressive inoperancy of the spirit and the word, an evacuation of that life of sense in which every poet's analogies for God are nurtured. The terrible tenuity, distance, and despondency of these lines enact the drama of verbal and historical aloneness, the emptiness of the displaced person, which is Arnold's special form of emptiness. Indeed Arnold's loneliness is more acute than the Indian's. For Arnold is displaced, not just in space and time, but in the realm of values as well: his is a moral and cultural aloneness.

Arnold realizes that an ascetic eastern sage, or a saintly crusader, a companion of Saint Louis, could have found on the "glacier-snows" (l. 90) of an Indian mountain peak or on a moonlit Mediterranean coast an appropriate place to die. But for the Victorian Arnold, a restless agnostic, who loves to ponder like Mansel and Spencer "God's... untold... mysteries" (l. 89), an inability to locate or name the unspeakable object of worship produces the anguish of a man born out of his time—the anguish of a religious man without religion. In death, as in life, his homelessness is absolute.

1. *Victorian Skepticism: Mansel and Spencer*

To enter the new Victorian firmament of equivocal symbolism is to chart the origin and progress of a skeptical Kantian tradition in nineteenth-century thought. Shrouding God in an elusive veil, Kant's critical philosophy gives rise in nineteenth-century Britain to the agnostic metaphysical theories of Sir William Hamilton and of his Victorian disciples Henry Mansel, Herbert Spencer, and T. H. Huxley. All four British thinkers contend that our words for God are merely equivocal signs, gestures in the direction of an unknowable Power which surpasses all the philosopher or theologian can think or say about Him.

In his Bamptom lectures for 1858, *The Limits of Religious Thought Examined in Eight Lectures*,[3] Henry Mansel, a lecturer on Kant and Dean of St. Paul's, contends the divine nature can never be logically enclosed by the mind's mutually exclusive concepts of a being that is at once absolute, infinite, and a First Cause. An absolute God is the negation of all relation: but the concept of a first cause is the

[3] London: J. Murray, 1867.

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absolute affirmation of a particular relation. If we try to escape from this apparent contradiction by introducing the idea of succession in time Mansel finds we are checked by a third conception: the idea that God is infinite. Contradictions so thorough-going tell with equal force, Mansel believes, against all dogmatists and all atheists. Though they may teach us, in some instances, that it is " our duty . . . to believe [what] we cannot conceive," the antinomies encompassing all our ideas of the Absolute and the Infinite are at bottom a confession of the impossibility of enclosing within logical schemes, in a few finite words or concepts, the inexhaustible dynamic life of God and His Creation.

Brought face to face with the insoluble antinomies which precipitate the crisis of religious intellectualism, Mansel follows Kant in proclaiming that " the highest principles of thought and action, to which we can attain, are regulative, not speculative." [4] The principles of our religion and morality " do not serve to satisfy the reason, but to guide the conduct: they do not tell us what things are in themselves, but how we must conduct ourselves in relation to them." Unlike Kant, however, Mansel finds he is no more able to conceive of an absolute morality that should be maintained in the form of a law of obligation than he is able to conceive of an absolute and infinite Creator. According to Kant, we know God's commands to be divine, not because they are commanded by God, but because we are morally bound by them. Mansel believes that in building the moral sense into a kind of Jacob's ladder, Kant's fiction of a moral law binding " upon all possible intelligences " reestabishes a form of divine traffic between heaven and earth at the inadmissible cost of elevating morality above the conditions of man's intelligence. Avoiding Kant's moral gnosticism as well as Hegel's theological version of the same dogma, Mansel exhorts us to recognize that mystery which really exists, and in the impotence of our reason to " take refuge in Faith." [5]

But can it be our duty to have faith in a God who is not only unknowable but also inconceivable? Like Mansel's contemporary, F. D. Maurice, we may feel that we cannot be asked to have faith in nothing. Surprisingly, Mansel's most sustained efforts to resolve these difficulties originate, not in the Bampton Lectures themselves, but in the eighth chapter of his earlier *Prolegomena Logica: An Inquiry into the Psychological Character of the Logical Processes* (Oxford, 1851).

[4] *The Limits of Religious Thought*, pp. 41, 42, 100.
[5] *The Limits of Religious Thought*, pp. 143, 86.

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Here Mansel is careful to distinguish between two kinds of negative thinking: one merely material or physical; the other formal or logical. The material form of negative thought exists in a man born blind: he has a negative idea of color in general. Such is the case, Mansel argues, with all our speculations concerning the nature and attributes of an infinite being. This material or psychological negation is not to be confused, however, with the formal or logical negations which exist in all cases of thoughts that annihilate themselves through self-contradiction.

Sir William Hamilton's demonstration that the concepts of the Absolute and the Infinite are self-contradictory would appear to be an example of this second kind of deficiency: a logical and formal defect. But in *The Limits of Religious Thought* Mansel offers a different interpretation. The contradictions that appear at first to be logical and formal are a result of a psychological condition. Because the condition of our consciousness is distinction and limitation, we are forced, for psychological reasons, to say that God is both limited and unlimited: He is "actually something . . . and actually nothing."[6] If He were not something, He could not be an object of our consciousness: but if He were not also nothing, He could not remain absolute and unlimited. Mansel's agnosticism consists in the absence of conception, not in the conception of an absent God. Merely to be "unable to think of an object as existing" is not at all the same thing, he insists, as "to be able to think of it as not existing."[7] The agnosticism that springs from the merely material or psychological form of negation is compatible with faith, for it asserts, undogmatically, only the absence of our knowledge of God, not our dogmatic knowledge of God's absence. Because our inability to conceive of God's attributes is not, as we may first think, a logical defect, but a result of a psychological deficiency in ourselves, we commit a "fallacy of dogmatic finality," to borrow A. N. Whitehead's phrase, whenever we conclude that our negative thoughts about God's attributes entail His non-existence as well.

[6] *The Limits of Religious Thought*, p. 51.

[7] "On Positive and Negative Thought," *Prolegomena Logica: An Inquiry into the Psychological Character of Logical Processes* (Oxford: W. Graham, 1851), p. 253.

[8] When, like Aristotle and Cicero, we mistake "a psychological deficiency for a logical impossibility" (*Prolegomena Logica*, p. 253), the first kind of

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Apart from the critique of F. D. Maurice, the most sustained Victorian attack upon Mansel's thesis is to be found in Part I, "The Unknowable," of *First Principles*, the major theological contribution of Mansel's most influential disciple, Herbert Spencer. Like T. H. Huxley, Spencer denies that the Absolute can ever be a mere negation of consciousness, as Mansel argues. For if the Absolute were merely an unknowable negation, how could we ever know it is unknowable? There is no reconciling our knowledge of the truth of this doctrine with the general condition which exists if it is true. In order to show how the Absolute escapes from conceptual thought, but not from consciousness in general, Spencer develops his theory of "symbolic conceptions." To conceive of scientific and religious truth at all, we must use either a metonymy, a word that allows the more or less randomly chosen part to stand for the whole (the thunder for God), or else an abstract but univocal sign, a notation like π or x, "utterly without resemblance"[9] to its referent. Our ultimate ideas of God, Space, and Time have to deal with entities whose attributes are too vast or numerous to be united in a single thought. "We must either drop in thought part of their attributes, or else not think of them at all."[10]

Though Spencer's God is present to the human mind, not as a mere

negative thought for the second, we pass from agnosticism to atheism. But to take this final step it is first necessary to "pronounce how consciousness exists in beings of a different nature from ourselves." To do so is manifestly impossible, since it would first "be necessary that we should be capable of possessing their nature and faculties, as well as our own, and of comparing the two together, by the aid of a third power independent of either." Mansel concludes, therefore, that as long as agnosticism confines itself to its proper sphere, to the merely material or psychological kind of negative thinking, it is powerless "to limit the province of faith by that of reason" (p. 255). According to Mansel, there is only one way in which agnosticism can force the theist to deny that what he cannot compass in thought he may still believe as existing. And that is by passing, quite illegitimately, "from criticism to dogmatism, a dogmatism resting its claim to dictation on a complete ignorance of the matter...it dictates" (p. 255). An example of such an "illegitimate passage" would be Feuerbach's theology, which in prying loose "the essence of Christianity" from a mummified mythology tries to shackle it to man instead.

[9] Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (New York: American Publishers Corporation, 1880), p. 94.

[10] *First Principles*, p. 22.

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negation, but as a kind of nebula out of which the solid nucleus of all later thought is formed, Spencer brings science and religion together only by demoting their symbols to the status of mere extrinsic signs. "Utterly without resemblance to that for which it stands," the theological sign is condemned to the eternal silence of Milton's "nethermost Abyss," the realms of "Chaos and ancient Night" (*Paradise Lost*, II, 969-70). Because his words for God are denied all substantial participation in the mysteries they evoke, Spencer's "altars to the unknown and unknowable God" [11] disturbingly resemble Schelling's altar to the Absolute. Both Gods are worshipped in an agnostic void, in that abyss of night where, in Hegel's acid phrase, all cows are black.

2. *Agnostic Theories of the Word: Arnold's Deconstruction*

The poet or reader who experiences David's love for Saul, in Browning's poem, as an analogy of God's love for man, must avoid two theories of the word. He must resist the idolatry of Patmore's "Eros and Psyche," which tends to consecrate all things erotic as an incarnation of God. And he must also resist agnostic theories, like those of Spencer and Mansel, which focus cynically on empty signifiers, on stable but abstract cipher-words of the speaker's own construction. Examples of cipher-words include Spencer's "unknowable God," or Arnold's blank counter for deity, his abstract re-definition of God as "the Eternal, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness."

To understand a skeptical or agnostic theory of the word, we must see how it differs from both an idolatrous and an analogical habit of imagining. An idolatrous theory of the word focuses upon full but unstable intrinsic signifiers, which tell us more about man's experience than God. A skeptical or agnostic theory of the word focuses upon stable but extrinsic signifiers, which concede the impossibility of defining God at all. Mediating between the two extremes are all analogical theories of the word, which focus on both the human and divine Word in a stable but only partial union of the signifier and its referent. For convenience, we can summarize the three possibilities in a diagram.

[11] *First Principles*, p. 36.

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FEATURE	IDOLATROUS THEORIES	ANALOGICAL THEORIES	SKEPTICAL AND AGNOSTIC THEORIES
Tropes	Metonymy; or metaphor in Coleridge's sense in *Aids to Reflection*, God is the eternal self.	Analogy, synecdoche: God is love.	Abstract symbol, persuasive re-definition of a concept: God is Arnold's "the Eternal, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness."
Poetic Examples	Patmore's "Eros and Psyche": human love is divine.	Browning's "Saul": human love is an analogy of God's love.	The Prior's definition of "soul" in "Fra Lippo Lippi": God or the soul has no equivalent.
Theological Doctrines	the Higher Critics, Feuerbach: Hopkins' Scotist doctrine of "haecceitas."	F. D. Maurice, Keble and the Tractarians: Hopkins' sacramental doctrine of "inscape."	Mansel, Spencer, Arnold: God is unknowable. Hopkins' Gnostic doctrine, in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," that spirit refuses to incarnate itself in natural forms.

An agnostic theologian like Mansel preserves the priority of God by refusing to have Him named. His "unknowable God" is a stable signifier, but totally devoid of any defining content. Like Browning's Prior, the skeptical theorist finds that he starts with a concept so primary that there is no way to name it without betraying its primacy: "Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke... no, it's not... / It's... well, what matters talking, it's the soul!" ("Fra Lippo Lippi," ll. 184–187). If God or the soul is not to remain just a gap in the text, just what is betrayed by words and hence left out, the language of the skeptic may have to focus on some empty signifier like Matthew Arnold's "stream of tendency," or his "transcendence of the lower by the higher self," until a mere cipher-phrase or an abstract concept begins to fill, without ambiguity, the holes left gaping in his text.

Arnold's persuasive re-definition of God retains the venerable emotive meaning of the signifier but changes the descriptive meaning of the signified. It is the technique of the demythologizer, who deconstructs the metaphors of the Bible in order to found a new religion of culture. But whenever such words enter Arnold's poetry or prose, trying to fill the vacuum left by the departure of God, they tend to produce the

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rarefied mountain atmosphere of "In Utrumque Paratus" or the stark, philosophic vocabulary of "Stagirus." To deconstruct the metaphors of religion and myth, and to assimilate them to the philosopher's conceptual arrangements, is to suffer the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction. The process of continuously paralleling metaphorical with conceptual language reaches a climax in the crabbed and tortured language of Empedocles' ode to Pausanias. There is a frightening spiritual slackness in this ode, an incredible flatness and despondency, which not even Empedocles' harp can quite turn into poetry. The banality and harshness match the process of dissolution, the transformation of Empedocles into a principle of pure, unbodied mind.

The habit of signifying God by mere ethical ideas takes possession of Arnold's mind long before he starts to search, in his theological prose, for an abstract formula that will give peace to his soul without insulting his intelligence. But by a painful paradox, Arnold's need for belief increases as his capacity for containing God in some concrete sign diminishes. In Arnold's struggle with language, as in his struggle with religious faith, there is revealed the loneliness of one who seeks univocal discourse with God, or at least the grace of analogical understanding, but who is left instead with only blank counters and extrinsic signs. Arnold's plight is that of his own Stagirus, the fourth-century counterpart of Mansel and Spencer, who empties his language, finally, of all analogies and symbols, in order to keep his words open to some higher truth. In thinking to rise higher to God, the abstracting mind finds it has come no closer. It is left to expire instead upon the void, able to discern in its words only the faintest trace or afterglow of God.

The allegorist's tendency to assimilate to his own deductive arrangements an originally metaphorical structure, like that of the Bible or some classical myths, is a recurrent feature of Arnold's poetry. In "The Buried Life" and "Rugby Chapel," for example, the urge to paraphrase his fictions, to pass prematurely from metaphor to exegesis, illuminates the *pons asinorum* of the poet who, unable profitably to avail himself of the ideas current at the time, devotes his energy to the construction of a new mythology of concern. So anxious is Arnold in "The Buried Life" to fill the form of his controlling signifier, without ambiguity, that he keeps elucidating this signifier—the "unregarded river of our life" (l. 39)—not once, but several times. The

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crustacean seascape of J. Alfred Prufrock's "buried life" is much fuller than Arnold's, and its flickering impressions of a "pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," ll. 73-74) are more resonant and alive. For a lover like Arnold's, a solitary who feels "a nameless sadness o'er [him] roll" (l. 3), something unsayable which he can never quite express, the "winding murmur" (l. 89) of the river is oddly eager to expose its mystery.

From genuine insight Arnold passes into his implausible theory of why Fate ordained that man should be unconscious of his buried life. The denunciation of man as a "frivolous" child (l. 31), who would betray his true identity if it were once revealed to him, is hectoring and unpleasant. The tone betrays the anxiety of the discursive thinker to assimilate the metaphors of poetry to an inferior group of abstract arguments and theories. If Arnold and his reader finally arrive at salvation in "The Buried Life," it is not through enunciating or embracing a doctrine of the hidden life. It is rather through experiencing a recovered wholeness by passing with Arnold into the pre-world of myth. In this world of Wordsworthian mountain-gods and seas a sense of healing powers in nature both includes and resolves complexity:

> And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
> And then he thinks he knows
> The hills where his life rose,
> And the sea where it goes. ("The Buried Life," ll. 95-98)

Combined with the self-imposed poverty of Arnold's concluding rhyme words ("knows," "rose," "goes," ll. 96-98), which float the lines down to as steady and unhurried a conclusion as any poem can have, the diminution of the metre from lines of twelve and ten syllables to three concluding tetrameters has the effect of securing the conclusiveness of the outcome, of making its dreary, almost sing-song descent at once stable and mysterious—fated but enigmatic, too. A poet more confident of his resources would have attached himself more closely to the river throughout. Instead of continuously paralleling metaphorical with conceptual language, he would have let his poem run "a course of lucky events," [12] as Frost says, trusting the sufficiency of what he finds.

[12] "The Figure a Poem Makes," in *Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, ed. H. Cox and E. Lathem (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 18.

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For a more resourceful combination of a stable signifier with an expanded narrative commentary we may turn to Arnold's famous elegy for his father, "Rugby Chapel." All exegesis, like allegory, tries to supply conceptual equivalents for the poet's fictions. But in doing so, it is in danger of using abstract symbols to diminish the power of metaphor and analogy, impoverishing the fullness of these tropes by making them conform to some conceptual norm. When Arnold, in "Rugby Chapel," abdicates imaginative vision for the discipline of elaborate critical commentary on his father's steadfast purpose, "Zealous, beneficent, firm" (l. 43), he seems to be taking just such risks. The surmise that Dr. Arnold, even in death, is still practising his moral calesthenics is meant to affirm, like the "practised . . . strength" (l. 42) of Pindar's athletes, a ritual link with deity. But the muscular theology of a Rabbi Ben Ezra leaves Arnold uneasy: he is not content to let his father bounce from his moral gymnasium into the silence of eternity. He wants that silence to speak, not just through the "murmur" of a single signifier, like the hidden river in "The Buried Life," but through the voice of several signifiers. To this end Arnold allows the traditional figure of the journey of life to generate, not just one, but several sets of landscape metaphors. The journey figure is a full and multiple signifier, more ambiguous than the hidden river, but better able to sustain the elegist's mixture of narrative and commentary.

Arnold's original figure of the ocean wave, which "swell'd,/Foam'd for a moment," then is "gone" (ll. 70-71), generates two much fuller narratives of life. In the first of these journeys, a mountain pilgrimage toward death, each traveler, in saving only himself, perishes alone. In the second journey, a desert pilgrimage, a dispirited band is re-inspired to press the journey homeward, like the children of Israel in *Exodus*. A poet who fully trusted his signifier, who relied wholly on narrative indirection like the Browning of "Childe Roland," would have told the stories of the two journeys, then let the reader guess the application of the second narrative to Arnold's father. On the other hand, an allegorical poet who translated his fictions directly into theory or concept, like the Arnold of "The Buried Life," would have told the story of the secular journey toward death, then added the story of the spiritual journey toward God by way of explicit commentary on the first narrative.

But Arnold, neither a symbolic poet nor an allegorist, mixes narrative and gloss throughout: and in the figure of the "Beacons of hope" (l.

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192) and the "angels" (l. 190) he introduces still another signifier, a trope which has to do with rugged prowess and athletic vigor. Though the figure of a military leader, marshalling his troops, may in some sense belong to the Moses-*Exodus* story, the strength of a Miltonic "angel," "Radiant with ardour divine" (l. 191), normally excludes the militancy of Arnold's final figure. An angel may be presented as a stern, generous, or even an affable figure, but not as a celestial Duke of Wellington, as a champion of warring Christianity.

The more Arnold trusts his signifiers, the more he fills them with rich, elusive meaning. The journey figures of "Rugby Chapel" are far less stable than the hidden river of "The Buried Life." But their very instability allows Arnold to glide, so to speak, from genre to genre, from allegorical pilgrimage to eulogy, from narrative to homily, refining his ideas as he goes. In celebrating his father's religion as a form of his own cultural ideal—as "a humanization of man in society," [13] Arnold deliberately allows the vehicle of his first allegorical journey to give way to its tenor. He then supplies a second journey, not because we need another clue to the identity of his tenor, but because he wants the reader to decipher more easily the qualities of perfection, as culture conceives them, which religion also shares.

The poet of "Dover Beach" and of "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" cannot, with propriety, write as a Victorian St. Augustine: he cannot present life as an unambiguous spiritual pilgrimage, leading straight from the rocks of the wilderness to the City of God. But neither, in an elegy for his father, a leader in the Victorian Broad Church movement, can he omit religion altogether. Arnold solves the problem, not by comparing his father directly with Moses, but by using the Mosaic "Servants of God" (l. 162) as a more capacious, less stable symbol. Signifying an heroic ideal, both biblical and secular, these "Servants" include Arnold's own prophets of culture, who recognize, like Arnold himself in "The Function of Criticism," that the "promised land ... will not be ours to enter, ... but to have desired to enter it, to have saluted it from afar, is already, perhaps,

[13] "Equality," in *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 483. More detailed accounts of Arnold's landscape pilgrimage can be found in Alan H. Roper's important article, "The Moral Landscape of Arnold's Poetry," *PMLA*, 77 (1962), 289-96, and in A. Dwight Culler's fine study, *Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966).

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the best distinction among contemporaries; it will certainly be the best title to esteem with posterity." [14] Instead of focusing on an empty signifier, the conventional journey of life, then filling that cipher with a preconceived concept, Arnold turns the journey into several rich and shifting symbols. These full, less stable signifiers enable Arnold to discover that the City of God (l. 208) is not just some goal at the end of time. The City, for Arnold, is the fullness of community. It is the goal of a communal resurrection, secular as well as biblical, and it exists in the depths of time as a whole.

3. *The Agnostic Imagination: Clough's "Adam and Eve"*

If a poet continues to give his words an expansive ambiguity, and if the process goes on unchecked, the final result may be the opposite of skepticism. In a demythologizer like Clough an originally agnostic theory of the word may veer round into an idolatrous focus on a full but unstable human signifier, as the image of man all but eclipses the image of God. The words of such a poet are at once full and empty. Their form is rich and present. But like a body from which the soul has departed, their theological meaning is impoverished. The signifier remains potent, but its divine referent is something dead or absent.

To celebrate the religion of man is to deconstruct all myths of God, in the manner of Feuerbach and such Victorian heirs of Feuerbach as Clough and Swinburne: "But God, if a God there be, is the substance of men which is man" (Swinburne, "Hymn of Man," l. 44). These poets' full, unstable signs demystify the analogy between the human and divine Word. They expose the divine Word as a distortion of the human word, and the human word as a mere alias of God. Words about the Word are no longer analogies that hide what they reveal. They are perpetual aliases, false names for God, designed to hide the scandal of His flight from the world.

Clough appears to agree with Feuerbach that all theology, rightly apprehended, is disguised anthropology. In focusing on a rich human signifier, the demythologizer seeks to expose the distortion imposed on man by a departed God. Though Clough laments in "Easter Day Naples, 1849" that God has receded, like vapor, into "the . . . vacant void" (l. 131), he insists in "Easter Day II" that "Though [God]

[14] "The Function of Criticism," *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, p. 258.

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be dead, He is not dead,/Nor gone, though fled,/Not lost, though vanished" (ll. 28-30). The contradiction is apparent, not real, because for Clough, as for Feuerbach, the Logos, in seeming to disappear, has in fact been reabsorbed into the creative word of man. Far from being a mere alias of God, the human word is the controlling signifier in the new mythologies of concern, which by a curious irony are said to be the creation of "demythologizers." Such a "demythologizer" can be studied to best advantage in Clough's dramatic character Adam, whose agnostic subversion of Eve's theology animates Clough's boldest experiment in Higher Criticism, his unjustly neglected sequence of poetic fragments, "Adam and Eve."

In Adam's reductive version of Eve's theology, "the mighty mythus of the Fall" (scene i, l. 80) is only dreamwork, originating in two trivial events: the death of a lamb and the chance appearance of a snake. Eve, the orthodox theist, whom one critic calls "the Tractarian of the family,"[15] is reluctant to profane the divine nature by using words idolatrously. History is still a vast theological drama for Eve, in which the finger of God obscurely guides the destinies of man. Adam, by contrast, a Higher Critic and a proto-existentialist, uses unstable signifiers, marked by caustic irony and by rude anti-climax, first to demythologize religion, and then to sketch in the outlines of his new mythology. The "Word" that Adam hears is the prophetic voice of a new experiment in theology. In celebrating the dynamics of flux, and the soul's perpetual falling away from the "moist provocative vernal mould" (scene i, l. 14), Adam is focusing on full, unstable signifiers. His "Word" is no longer an alias, the trace of some departed content, but the name of a force that is evolving and dynamic. Though no orthodox First Cause is involved, Adam's attitude is in a refined sense religious, an attitude of reverence he feels for the life process itself: "Live and grow," the Word exhorts him, "Look still/ Upward, spread outward. Trust, be patient, live" (scene i, ll. 117-118).

The clue to the movement and unity of Clough's poem is the underground dramatic metaphor of severance and reabsorption. The poem's union of contraries is most explicit in Adam's culminating vision, when he sees himself "fade," "vanish," "sink," before merging into Eve

[15] R. K. Biswas, *Arthur Hugh Clough, Towards a Reconsideration* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 259.

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(scene xiv, ll. 26, 28). It is anticipated by Adam's tenderness for Eve, which can be heard in his rough-handed but apt banter: "Moping again, my love?" (scene iv, l. 19). His breaks and pauses—"Yes, I dare swear" (scene iv, l. 19)—express male impatience in the face of feminine scruples. But even at his most subversive, Adam is gentle and reflective, lightly mocking his wife's "religious crotchet[s]" (scene iv, l. 21). As husband and wife learn to grow in deference to each other, their opposition-in-love enables Clough to dramatize the expected and desired union of contraries that makes any marriage possible.

The moment of greatest union comes in the lyrical debate on the voice (scene iv, ll. 50-83), which marks a moment of concentrated attention, giving the feel of Adam's slowly crystallizing thought.

> Believe me, I will listen to the Word;
> For not by observation of without
> Cometh the Kingdom of the Voice of God:
> It is within us—let us seek it there. (scene iv, ll. 57-60)

The compact grammar of Adam's appeal works by a deft allusive turn. His "Whiggery of the Inner Voice," to use a dismissive phrase of T. S. Eliot's, appears less subversive when it is launched in the name of a slightly altered version of a biblical text. Having established the ear as the instrument of God's reception, Adam wins assent to the urgency of the swift move inward by assimilating an auditory impression, "the Voice of God," to a palpably visible thing, a "Kingdom." As God, His Kingdom, and His Voice inside the heart, all begin to telescope in a single mounting impression, Adam is able to show, with some display of logic, that all the forces of good and evil struggle and yet compose—not in the "unmeaning arbitrary" (l. 51) Word of a divine despot—but in the full (though constantly decomposing and regrouping) signifiers of the more completely human and humane theology that Feuerbach envisages.

The dangers of equivocation persist, however, in the exchange that follows, as Eve insists, with fine illogic, that the "one Voice/Goes somehow to the sense of what [she] say[s]" (scene iv, ll. 67-68). Adam's problem of problems—his difficulty in discerning the "Voice amidst the voices" (l. 65)—Eve presumes to resolve with an evasive "somehow." In her unstable style of speech and thought: "you, yourself, my Adam, you at least/Acknowledge *some* time *somehow* we did

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wrong" (ll. 82-83, italics mine), Eve reveals that her manner and logic are less sure than her husband's. Her pauses show her hesitating and feeling for the right words and thoughts, creating one more fantasy for the loving, but more logical, Adam to reject: "My child, I never granted even that" (l. 84). With a sure instinct for a congenial subject, Clough brings out boldly the disturbing psychological implications and ontological puzzles of the Old Testament drama. Even in registering to the full his "terrible possession" (scene ii, I. 29) of God's displeasure, Adam's learned asides make fun of the garden solemnities of *Genesis* and Milton. The "large eye" of God's "truth" (scene ii, l. 22) is also a prefabricated stage property—the artifice of eternity with a vengeance; and in an outrageous pun ("He comes. He calls"—l. 22), God is pictured as an uncivilized house guest, dropping in on his children at an indecorous hour.

But what look at first like incidental maliciousness and spirited invective in the many mocking protests against Eve's "senseless iteration" of her fantasies of guilt fall into place as part of Adam's own religion enterprise, his own "experiment's sum" (scene i, l. 30). In combining a biblical fable in the manner of Milton with a satiric transformation of that mode, in the manner of the Higher Critics, Clough has perfected a dramatic form able to entertain and push to the limit the conflict between full but unstable intrinsic signifiers and signifiers that are stable but empty. Most theology, he shows, is superannuated myth; it is the mere perpetual alibi, the false trace or track, of a God who has fled.

4. *Hopkins and Scotus*

Properly to appreciate the difficulty of recovering an analogical middle ground the literary historian has to study, not just the language of agnostics and new mythologizers, but the language of devotional poets like Hopkins and Patmore. In Hopkins' early poem "Nondum," the link between the "glories of . . . earth" and "the hand that wrought them" (ll. 7-8) has finally broken: the great chain of analogy lies scattered in ruins. And in a poem like Patmore's "Magna est Veritas" the purposeless, glad ocean, curiously indifferent to every human perception of it, escapes the mesh of the poet's empty signifiers. But if the Patmore of "Magna est Veritas," like the Frost of "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep" is agnostic, the Patmore of "Eros and Psyche"

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is deeply idolatrous. The awe and expansiveness of Milton's Nativity Ode, of Crashaw's "Hymn to St. Theresa," to say nothing of Keats's "Ode to Psyche," entirely elude the fully erotic, but unstable, signifiers of Patmore's Psyche odes. The incarnational assertion of the analogical symbol, so central in Hopkins' and Patmore's great sacramental verse, must breach the antithesis of two opposed tendencies: the agnostic focus on stable but extrinsic signs, which are mere aliases of a God who has fled; and the idolatrous focus on a full creation, on unstable but intrinsic signifiers, which blasphemously replace the Word of God with the words of man.

The agnostic, centrifugal pull in some of Hopkins' poetry of despair, though largely a predilection of his mind and temperament, is inadvertently reinforced, I think, by his study of Scotus. Why should the analogical mirrors that glisten in "God's Grandeur," and that "flame out, like shining from shook foil" in many of Hopkins' sacramental lyrics, be of no avail in "Nondum?" Creation gapes in this poem as an immense and "empty hall" (l. 10), as an ancestral ruin, the estate of some indifferent host, a lord who has abandoned door and hearth. Even the sanctification of time is abandoned, as "ages" and "aeons" run on and down, benign only to evil and "life's tomb-decked way" (ll. 20, 39). All Hopkins can do is await a miracle: a restoration of the hierarchical character of the first creation, a miracle which will allow him, in the sure light of analogy, to track once again the "abysses infinite" (l. 25), recovering the clue to God's "dread and vacant maze" (l. 30). Like Duns Scotus, Hopkins aspires to a knowledge of God that is more than analogical. But, paradoxically, in striving for unmediated vision, Hopkins, in his darkest poems, ends by seeing much less than Scotus. His effort to harness the divine energy, to make it univocal, has the unforeseen effect of knocking down the scaffold of analogy, producing a knowledge of God that is merely equivocal. How, precisely, does this dismantling of the ladder, this breaking of the complex hierarchy of being, take place?

In opposition to Aquinas, Duns Scotus insists that our concept of God is univocal. If Aquinas' theory of knowledge were true, if the object of the mind's knowledge were merely the forms of material things, Scotus believes the mind would be limited in its knowledge of God to sense experience: no genuine theology, or science of God, would be possible. Though Scotus and Aquinas both agree that we generally see God through a darkened glass, they offer different ex-

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planations of this mystery. For Aquinas, the shadows that dim the analogical mirrors are a result of the nature of the human soul itself: as long as the soul is united to a body, it can have knowledge only of incarnated forms, of forms that are immanent in matter. According to Scotus, Aquinas' theory of the soul's hylomorphic composition degrades it beneath its natural dignity. Our darkened understanding of God is not, Scotus argues, a result of any defect inherent in the body or soul, any crack or flaw in the reflecting mirror itself. It is rather the result of a hindrance, of an intercepting veil placed between the mirror and its object, placed there *forte ex peccato*, as a result of sin, as St. Augustine had argued. And just as there is no material impediment, no flaw in the mind's reflecting mirror, to distort its knowledge of God, so, Scotus argues, there is nothing in the mind to hinder its intellectual apprehension of particular things. Instead of opening upward slowly, from all the phenomena of the visible and invisible kingdoms, through choiring angels, to successively higher levels of being, as in the analogical universe of Aquinas and Aristotle, Scotus' idea of univocity may disclose, in each created thing, a total image of God.

Hopkins is temperamentally a Scotist in his belief that the singular thing is intelligible in itself. Rather than climbing, arduously, a ladder to God, the soul may leap at once from the special qualities of each created thing, from each fixed vortex of God's ubiquitous energy, to a direct participation in its stress or force. But in affirming that all phenomenal being expresses one and the same thing—the beauty of Christ, in whose image all things are created, why should Hopkins also snap the analogical link between high and low? Why should Hopkins' theology of "realism," with its Scotist inflection, which turns each created thing, in its own unique way, into a selving or mirroring of God, begin to darken the mirror of analogy?

One answer can be sought in Hopkins' idolatrous defense of the unique identity or *haecceitas* of God's creations. So obsessed does he become with idiosyncratic detail that he involuntarily resists the notion that God can truly be what Scotus calls a *universale concretum*, a deity who "is 'fetched' or 'pitched' or 'selved' in every other self."[16] In seeking a bulwark in specific detail, it is as if Hopkins were aspiring

[16] *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of G. M. Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 128.

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to be more "Scotist" than Scotus. In "No Worst, there is none," for example, Hopkins is so totally obsessed by each exquisite and refined detail of a torture he thinks peculiar to himself that he loses sight of what connects his torment with the suffering of Orestes and King Lear. In celebrating the *concrete* universal at the expense of the concrete *universal*, Hopkins loosens rather than strengthens the analogical bond.

Hopkins initially gravitates toward a Scotist veneration of each created thing. But veneration has a way of turning to idolatry. And another explanation of Hopkins' loss of analogical grip is the very extremity with which he repudiates this tendency. So overpowering is Hopkins' fear of being annihilated by the pantheistic idols of this world, which his Scotist veneration of each unique item threatens to enshrine, that at times he veers too far in the opposite direction. Hopkins never tires of energetically repudiating a promiscuous "chromatic" merging of the individual self in the "Intellectus Agens" of the Averroists, or in the Hegelian Absolute. But in resisting their centripetal pull, in a bleakly Gnostic testament like "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" he swings so far out from every concrete signifier, beyond the last orbit of analogy, that he is whirled into dark, unpeopled space. As Hopkins moves toward deeper and unnerving aloneness, he experiences the utter religious and cultural homelessness of a stranded astronaut, forever drifting in the void, like one of Dante's lost souls.

Moreover, instead of broadening his theory of Incarnation, Hopkins is in danger of greatly attenuating it when he affirms, with Scotus, that the decree of the Incarnation is prior to the creation of angels and of men. Hopkins sees all things as created, not only in the Christ of history, but also in a pre-human and Plotinian Christ, a Son who descends into an unhistoric world of "aeonian" or angelic time (the scholastic *aevum*). In such speculations, the firmament of analogical symbol is already in uneasy motion. Hopkins' shadowy conception of an "extrinsic and less than eternal" procession of the Son from the Father, in some invisible manner, "aeons before the Incarnation and 'before Abraham was,'" stands, in many ways, as the very antithesis of the concrete, historic, temporal character of the analogical symbol.[17]

In losing the fixed compass points of an analogical universe, the

[17] "Creation and Redemption The Great Sacrifice," *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of G. M. Hopkins*, p. 197.

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tortured plaintiff of a sonnet like "Thou art indeed just, Lord" finds that all stability has gone out of religion and all assurance out of the petitioner's words. As the victim of idiosyncrasy, of unrepeatable details, Hopkins seems reduced to a passive registry of shaking wind and building birds. What were once analogies of spiritual renovation are now the husks of language, mere metonymic notations: they are keys which fit no inward lock. Hopkins' sonnet is, accordingly, a confusion of tongues; and if he finds a way to speak to God at last, "the victory is hardly won," as one critic remarks, "and perhaps only temporary." [18] Tortured at the very centre of his faith, the Hopkins of the dark sonnets abandons any pretense to analogy. He improvises instead in a language of circling metaphors and dark equivocations, which change the whole direction of devotional poetry.

In the harsh, crowded alliterations of another dark sonnet, "No Worst, there is none," the violent wrenching and jostling of elements turn the human word itself into a bestial cry, the wail of some possessed, demented animal: "My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief/Woe, world-sorrow" (ll. 5-6). The deletion of the human subject, which is effaced behind "cries," and the dropping of connectives, increase the terrible pathos of the lines. The desperate metonymies—which substitute "steep" for cliff and "deep" for the abysmal sea (l. 12)—cramp the language to frenzied jottings. Words are now no longer analogical mirrors, glistening in emblematic reflection of an inscaped God. Nor are they synecdoches, the monads of an hierarchical order. Hopkins makes no attempt to conceal the fact that his atomic heaps, "Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed" (l. 9), unique and unrepeatable in their recalcitrant otherness, are as much the enemy of inscape as the intractable "dough, crust, dust," the "treadmire toil" ("That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire," ll. 6-7), of another despairing poem. In their stubborn nominalism, such particulars are open to a helter-skelter freedom, like the frenzy of the Furies; and they waste no time in driving from Hopkins' poetic firmament the last saving vestige of inscaped form.

Once the umbilical cord between words and the Word is cut, language is powerless to reach out and touch things. After brief spurts of energy, words have a way of collapsing like burned-out

[18] R. A. Brower, *The Fields of Light* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 27.

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rockets, covering Hopkins in a shower of explosive, hissing consonants:

> Pitched past pitch of grief,
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring. (ll. 1-2)
>
> Here! creep,
> Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: (ll. 12-13)

Such words are frantic, unstable signifiers, gestures thrown out in the direction of the void, in alliterative spasms of energy. When the agitated language of the dreadful sonnets finally seems to stablize, as in the first regular pentameter line of "No worst, there is none," it is usually, as here, at the very end of the sonnet: "all/Life death does end and each day dies with sleep" (ll. 13-14). Since the only comfort that stable words and regular metres can offer is the equivocal comfort of sleep, which is a rehearsal of death, we realize that even the tranquility of a traditionally sententious closure can provide at most a temporary place of refuge in the storm.

Nowhere in Victorian poetry is the isolating, agnostic imagination more intense than in the dreadful sonnets of Hopkins. Despite his free and ingenious handling of words, the Hopkins of the agnostic poems laments that his language, like his life, has been disembowelled, eviscerated. Contracted into the shrunken testament of a eunuch, unable to "breed one work that wakes" ("Thou art indeed just, Lord," l. 13), Hopkins' words are lifeless and emasculated. They are mere dissolving signifiers, empty tokens, without the power to participate analogically in God. The analogical symbol has moved to the periphery of this firmament: and without the traditional analogy of sense and spirit, the human word itself has lost the power to name. At the centre of the new dark firmament of agnostic poetry, which is too often Hopkins' firmament, stands the image of the suffering poet, the victim of an *ultima solitudo*, isolated like Arnold by an utter personal, theological, and historical aloneness.

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LOUISE K. BARNETT*

Displacement of Kin in the Fiction of Henry James

1

In his essay "The Structural Analysis of Literature: The Tales of Henry James," Tzvetan Todorov tries to identify and to explore "the figure in Henry James's carpet, the primal plan on which everything else depends, as it appears in each one of his works."[1] This "primal plan" can be determined, Todorov continues, "by superimposing the different works one on the other, like Galton's photographs, reading them as if they were a series of transparencies."[2] In the ensuing discussion, I also intend to superimpose James's fictions on each other; but I shall do so in order to isolate a very different figure in the carpet, namely, the novelist's persistently negative presentation of blood ties and his consequent creation of surrogate figures to assume the traditional obligations of kinship. James's fiction reveals a deepseated distrust in the ability of kin, whether immediate family or other relatives, to carry out their conventional roles and duties. Failure is usually a given in his depiction of blood relationships. What is more, all too often the surrogate only replicates the egocentric behavior of the displaced kin, leaving the victim doubly deprived.

Whenever James dwells on family relationships in his fiction, some part of the pattern of kinship displacement always emerges. Characters who do not carry out their familial responsibilities range from the cruel and coercive—Madame de Bellegarde, for instance, a husband-poisoner as well as a terrible mother—to the benignly neglectful and disoriented mother of Daisy Miller. Even James's most benevolent parent, Adam Verver, fits the mold: although his relationship with his daughter is positive, it carries a negative potential that almost destroys her marriage. The failure or absence of familial

* Louise K. Barnett, an Assistant Professor of English at Rutgers, has published a number of articles on fiction.

[1] *Structuralism: An Introduction*, ed. David Robey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), p. 74.

[2] *Ibid.*

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support may be an initial given, as it is in *The Portrait of a Lady*. More frequently, however, as in *The Awkward Age* or *What Maisie Knew*, the full extent of parental dereliction each young protagonist experiences cannot be grasped until the unfolding of the entire plot.

When the needed surrogate does not appear to fill a void or displace a ruinous parent, those bereft of familial support are necessarily doomed. Completely without kin, Milly Theale remains an unprotected innocent who cannot hope to survive.[3] Nor can Claire de Cintré resist her family with only the help of a weak surrogate mother in Mrs. Bread. Most affecting of such cases of unrescued vulnerability is "Europe," James's devastating portrait of a mother who, it would seem, calculatingly destroys her three daughters. The narrator describes Mrs. Rimmle as an aging woman who, having lived her own life exhaustively, now usurps her daughter's time: "'They're all growing old together—it will presently be too late; and their mother meanwhile perches over them like a vulture .... She'll survive them each and all.'"[4] When Jane, one of the elderly sisters, goes to Europe, she refuses to come back as scheduled; another sister dies when she realizes that it has become too late for her to get away; and the remaining daughter at the end of the tale looks older than her ancient mother. Although the young narrator sees what is happening and is sympathetic to the sisters, he is a mere acquaintance who has no means of saving them from a malevolent parent.

The inadequacy of these fictive blood relations can be measured against the ideal of affection and support that James invoked in describing his own mother's "exquisite maternity":

> It was a perfect mother's life—the life of a perfect wife. To bring her children into the world—to expend herself for years,

[3] Because "it would be almost impossible for an individual by himself to survive," according to Claude Levi-Strauss, "[the] two calamities of primitive society ... [are] the bachelor and the orphan," *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, rev. ed., trans. James Harle Bell, et al. (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. 39. See also Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1967), p. 15: "A 'kinless' man was at best a man without social position; at worst he was a dead man." Reflecting modern society, James's fiction demonstrates the role of kin in psychic more than physical survival although in a significant number of instances those deprived of kin also die.

[4] *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel, 12 vols. (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1961-64), X, 436, hereafter cited as *Tales*. Further references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text.

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> for their happiness and welfare—then, when they had reached a full maturity and were absorbed in the world and in their own interests—to lay herself down in her ebbing strength and yield up her pure soul to the celestial power that had given her this divine commission.[5]

In this idealized portrait of Mary James, life and maternity are one. The "hourly devotion to each and all of us"[6] which James describes so reverently is at odds with that striving for self-assertion which causes so many of his characters to abandon their familial duties. Reverence aside, James thus seems to anticipate Talcott Parsons' modern formulation of the responsibilities that the parental role entails: "A primary function and characteristic of the family is that it should be a social group in which in the earliest stages the child can 'invest' all of his emotional resources, to which he can become overwhelmingly 'committed' or on which he can become fully 'dependent.'"[7]

Both James and Parsons describe the perfect family life as resting upon an absolute devotion to the child's welfare, a commitment the parents in James's fiction are deflected from by self-absorption. Their inadequacy leads to the second part of the paradigm—the replacement of the missing or derelict blood relation with a surrogate, a substitution which may be only fantasized, tentatively undertaken, or completely carried through. In "The Author of 'Beltraffio'" the possible adoption by a surrogate is suggested but not seriously entertained. After Mark Ambient confesses that he and his wife will probably kill their son by fighting over him, the narrator offers to take Dolcino, "the apple of discord." Ambient agrees that "'it would be quite the best thing we could do'" (*Tales*, V, 317), but, hardly ready to give up the child to an acquaintance he has known for barely half an hour, he shares his wife's discomfort at the idea of even the briefest separation from their child. As a result, Dolcino is inevitably sacrificed to his parents' warring egos.

In "The Pupil" the actual attempt to shift Morgan Moreen from parent to surrogate becomes the tale's climactic event. Distressed by

[5] *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford, 1947), p. 41.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[7] Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1955), p. 19.

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his parents' irresponsibility, Morgan has dreamed of joining his tutor Pemberton, a parent-surrogate who loves him and—unlike his natural parents—is willing to sacrifice his own interests for him. Yet Morgan's idea is only a fantasy: he regards life with his tutor as a freely chosen act, a masculine adventure in which he would quite improbably assume adult responsibility. The fantasy makes the actuality of parental abandonment all the harder to bear. That the Moreens, who profess such devotion to the boy, should seriously wish to escape their parental role provokes the traumatic shock that causes Morgan's death.[8] James presents the situation emblematically when he places the dying boy between parent and surrogate: "For a moment, while they held him together, they looked all their dismay into each other's eyes" (*Tales*, VII, 460).

The rivalry between parent and surrogate becomes even more pronounced in *The Other House*, where the clash of two surrogates receives the greater emphasis. Tony Bream, who has promised his late wife not to remarry during their child's lifetime, is loved by two women, Jean Martle and Rose Armiger. Content to convert her love for the father into love for his daughter Effie, Jean becomes a benevolent surrogate mother. The more passionate Rose cannot sublimate her strong erotic feeling into surrogate maternity. Goaded by the knowledge that Tony prefers Jean, Rose murders the child; yet by cancelling the condition of fatherhood, she ironically frees him to marry her rival. Although Rose is an impressive villainess, the only Jamesian character guilty of premeditated child murder, parental failure has once again played a decisive role. Julia Bream's fear of a wicked stepmother for her daughter, her husband's initial acquiescence to her dying wish, and, later, his passive and lighthearted response to the danger, are determinants as weighty as Rose's passion in bringing about Effie's death. When Tony and Jean admit their complicity, they are consciously guilty for having failed to protect Effie; subconsciously, they are acknowledging their yearning to be free of the impediment to their marriage. In constructing this sexual triangle around the parental role and resolving it in a brutal murder, James suggests the incompatibility of familial duty and self-interest which so much of his fiction treats in less violent and polarized forms. Elsewhere, the "good

[8] Leon Edel has noted a general pattern in James's treatment of children in which boys die and girls survive (cited in Muriel G. Shine, *The Fictional Children of Henry James* [Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1968], p. 76).

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heroine" is allowed to accept maternity as a reasonable substitute for erotic fulfilment, while the "bad heroine" invariably refuses to do so.[9]

Yet when the shift from parent to surrogate does take place, James never handles it in an unqualifiedly positive fashion. In *The Spoils of Poynton* Mrs. Gereth sacrifices herself in order to transform her surrogate daughter into her daughter-in-law, but she only succeeds in losing everything for both of them; in *A Turn of the Screw* the governess may be too late to counter the effects of previous corruption on her small charges or the source of corruption in herself; in *The Wings of the Dove* Kate Croy's domineering aunt not only denies proper support to her kin but also corrupts her by values and ambitions more dangerous to Kate than the useless Mr. Croy.

James's fiction provides, in short, a complete spectrum of negative possibilities whose underlying constant is the tragic paradox that blood relations are both essential and unreliable.[10] Given the central importance and prescriptive nature of kinship roles, it is not surprising that surrogates can never fully compensate for the crucial failures of kin.[11]

2

The most common victim of deprivation in James's fiction is a daughter, whose culpable parent is usually her mother. Maternal

[9] James used the terms "Good Heroine" and "Bad Heroine" in his first notebook entry of the idea which became *The Other House* (*Notebooks*, pp. 140-41). This original version had the child survive her attempted murder and bring about the marriage of her father to the good heroine.

[10] Possible biographical reasons for this attitude are not the subject of this essay, but they are prominently remarked by Leon Edel in *Henry James: The Untried Years* (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1953). In Edel's view James as a child was confused by the "reversal of role relation" in his parents, concerned that his father had no occupational identity, and disturbed by the rootlessness of the family. Edel concludes that James's life "was to be a long search to understand this perversely ambiguous world of his childhood" (p. 48).

It is also possible to see the negative portrayal of blood relations in James's fiction as a sensitive observer's response to abruptly changing times. As Christopher Lasch points out in his study of the family, "the divorce crisis, feminism, and the revolt of youth originated in the nineteenth century," *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. xiv.

[11] As Parsons states, p. 17, "The statuses of marriage and parenthood are most definitely linked to expectations and obligations, both legal and informal, which are not simply discretionary with the individuals concerned." Similarly, Levi-Strauss, p. 43, remarks "the group's assertion that where relationships between the sexes are concerned, *a person cannot do just what he pleases.*"

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failure may be more prominent in James's fiction than paternal because, as Robin Fox writes, "the mother-child tie is inevitable and given," [12] or because, as the authorial voice of *What Maisie Knew* remarks about the Faranges' divorce proceedings: "It was not so much that the mother's character had been more absolutely damaged as that the brilliancy of a lady's complexion . . . might be more regarded as showing the spots." [13] In the words of Maisie's stepmother, "A lady's expected to have natural feelings" (*NY*, XI, 62). Primarily associated with "status-giving and income-earning" functions, the traditional father could avoid much direct involvement with his children; mothers, on the other hand, have customarily been responsible for nurturing and the communication of feeling.[14]

Those Jamesian daughters who experience the failure of kin are typically both passive and powerless, a conjunction most commonly found in the young and perhaps more extreme in females than in males. Maisie is one of the youngest of James's protagonists, a psychologically battered child who is the victim of a succession of parental failures and displacements. The paradigm of displacement and substitution gains intensity through repetition: capriciously moved from one bad situation to another by the adult motives of hatred and greed Maisie temporarily finds surrogates in the new spouses her natural parents acquire, but is finally abandoned by parents and step-parents alike. The one truly nurturing person in the novel is her elderly governess, Mrs. Wix: "What Maisie felt was that she [Mrs. Wix] had been, with passion and anguish, a mother" (*NY*, XI, 24). Stepping into the vacuum that surrounds Maisie, this genuine mother accepts her as a surrogate for the daughter she has lost.

It is the commitment of parenthood—the "passion and anguish" of it—that the Faranges, and later the step-parents, refuse to accept. As Maisie's appealing stepfather Sir Claude remarks, no woman today wants children, but Maisie's mother "can't help the one she *has* got" (*NY*, XI, 61). Mrs. Farange sees the maternal role as an inconvenience, but one that can be converted into a weapon against her ex-husband. Her behavior toward Maisie is unpredictable since it depends upon how she can best use her for destructive purposes at any given moment.

[12] *Kinship and Marriage*, p. 40.

[13] *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, 24 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1908), XI, 24. Further references to the novels will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text following the abbreviation *NY*.

[14] Parsons, p. 15.

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Avoidance alternates with explicit repulsion: on one occasion Mrs. Farange refuses to see her daughter for three days; on another she embraces Maisie violently, protests her love, and then suddenly hurls the child away.

Maisie learns quickly both from her own experience and the comments of others that her natural mother has no affection for her. Nevertheless, her desire for maternal affection persists. When she is abruptly left in the charge of her mother's current admirer, the Captain, his praise of Mrs. Farange triggers an emotional outburst in Maisie: "It was almost unbelievable balm—it soothed so her impression of danger and pain .... 'Oh mother, mother, mother,' she sobbed" (*NY*, XI, 153). In her state of emotional deprivation and insecurity Maisie is willing to adopt the Captain's positive view of her mother as her own; she urges him to say that he loves her mother so that she, too, can say it. The yearning for maternal affection revealed in this scene does not totally overwhelm Maisie's realistic assessment of her situation, for she goes on to tell the Captain that her mother won't have her "in any place." The last sordid detail of Mrs. Farange's abandonment of Maisie emerges when Maisie's step-mother tells her, "'She isn't your mamma any longer .... Sir Claude has paid her money to cease to be'" (*NY*, XI, 305-6). The mal-treatment of Maisie is continued by her step-parents, who see her presence as legitimizing their illicit relationship. In the final confrontation over Maisie Mrs. Wix bases the superiority of her claim on her willingness to serve rather than use Maisie: "'I'll do more for her than *you* ever did!' Mrs. Wix retorted to Mrs. Beale. 'I'll work my fingers to the bone'" (*NY*, XI, 359).

What Maisie Knew exhibits the complete paradigm of kinship displacement followed by surrogate substitution. The moral values of each part are obviously dichotomized—the Faranges are monsters of egotism, Mrs. Wix is totally selfless, and Maisie is an extreme example of victimization. Clearly the abandoned daughter is better off for having a surrogate, someone selflessly devoted to her happiness, but just as clearly she is not as well off as she would have been had a natural parent proffered such support. As James wrote in his notebook, Mrs. Wix takes Maisie into "her own poor, bare shabbiness of home and life." [15]

[15] *Notebooks*, p. 262. Mrs. Wix is limited by her "dingy decencies, her old-fashioned conscience," as James described her (*Notebooks*, pp. 257-58), but it

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The Awkward Age also replaces a culpable parent with a benevolent surrogate, but it is neither as schematic nor as morally unambiguous as *What Maisie Knew*. Nanda Brookenham is the daughter whose mother resents both the responsibilities and the limitations of the maternal role. Her antitype, the Duchess, regards her own stepdaughter as "all" whereas Mrs. Brookenham insists that Nanda is "just" her daughter: "'I've my life to lead and she's a part of it'" (*NY*, IX, 56).

In this his most extensive treatment of the mother-daughter relationship James presents the mother's aspirations as unequivocally illegitimate. According to the Duchess, Mrs. Brookenham "must sacrifice either her daughter or what she once called to me her intellectual habits" (*NY*, IX, 255). Through periphrasis the Duchess implies that Mrs. Brookenham's motives are other than what she says; they are, in fact, more sexual than intellectual. The freedom Mrs. Brookenham seeks at her daughter's expense is motivated by a desire to be preeminent in a mostly male circle of admirers where her image of youthful attractiveness is challenged by the reminder of an almost grown daughter. Nanda's entrance into adulthood is thus postponed to satisfy her mother's vanity and egotism. More than a negligent parent, Mrs. Brookenham is a formidable rival, jealous of a possible attachment between her favorite bachelor acquaintance and her daughter. She envies a freedom in Nanda's life that "suddenly loomed larger than any freedom of her own" (*NY*, IX, 328).[16] Nanda is a victim of the person who ought to be, as the Duchess asserts, "'a girl's most intelligent friend'" (*NY*, IX, 57).

would be a mistake to view these qualities negatively when she is the only person to provide Maisie with unqualified love. To see her as simply another bad influence that Maisie must escape is to blur the distinction between her maternal devotion and the self-indulgent behavior of the unscrupulous adults who surround Maisie.

[16] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in an historical study of mother-daughter and other female relationships in the nineteenth century notes a change from a mother daughter relationship of "closeness and mutual dependency" to one of routine hostility. She conjectures: "The functional bonds that held mothers and daughters together in a world that permitted few alternatives to domesticity might well have created a source of mutuality and trust absent in societies where greater options were available for daughters than for mothers," "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs*, I (1975), 17. James is notably modern in his treatment of this theme.

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Parental failure is established at the beginning of *The Awkward Age*, although we cannot foresee its specific consequences. Mr. Longdon, an elderly bachelor who once loved and lost Nanda's grandmother, is the surrogate who appears, like an "*oncle d'Amérique*" or "fairy godmother," to rescue Nanda (*NY*, IX, 181).[17] Plot and paradigm are identical: the plot evolves as a struggle between parent and surrogate over Vanderbank, the man both Nanda and her mother love. While Mrs. Brookenham is determined to have him remain the ornament of her own circle, Mr. Longdon, by furnishing the dowry that the parents cannot, hopes to bring about Vanderbank's marriage to Nanda. The novel concludes with Nanda leaving her parents' house permanently to be virtually adopted by Mr. Longdon. Against her mother's opposition, Nanda has not been able to achieve what she wants, but she does assert herself by bringing about the marriage of the Duchess's Aggie to Mitchy, the suitor favored by her mother for Nanda herself. This negative power is all that Nanda has, and ultimately all that her mother has as well. To an important degree each ruins the other's life, for Vanderbank—the object of their contention—rejects both in the end. Mr. Longdon's considerable efforts have been unable to make up for Nanda's unsupervised upbringing.

Still, James's fiction more commonly reveals a pattern of displacement and substitution less completely articulated than those furnished by *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*. *Daisy Miller* is yet another version of the victimized daughter, but here the basic paradigm is subsumed within a larger pattern of individual defiance of society. Daisy is neither passive nor totally blameless in her flouting of the Roman expatriate society; nevertheless, she, too, is victimized by lack of parental attention.

Whereas the mothers of Maisie and Nanda are too self-preoccupied to take on maternal responsibilities, Mrs. Miller lacks enough sense of self to make any impression on others. Her failure as a mother is simply part of her failure as an autonomous adult. It seems likely that Mrs. Miller's persistent dyspepsia is a response to and a retreat from her uncomfortable role as a wife and mother. Coerced into selfless mater-

[17] The words which clearly describe Mr. Longdon's surrogate role are spoken by Mrs. Brookenham, but her thoughts at this initial stage of their acquaintance are on what he can do for Vanderbank, not her daughter.

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nity by her husband's decree that she must come to Europe for her daughter's sake, Mrs. Miller longs to return to Schenectady and to Dr. Davis, the one person who makes her feel important. Her children are badly served by Mrs. Miller's dereliction. Randolph, age nine, is losing his teeth through an unchecked consumption of candy, jeopardizing his health by staying up until all hours, and neglecting his mind by refusing instruction. By being allowed to go about as she pleases, Daisy suffers socially; her death as a result of unwise exposure to the malarial air of the Colosseum by moonlight is, among other things, a measure of Mrs. Miller's maternal failure.

Winterbourne, who is both observer and interested party, repeatedly notes the absence of maternal guidance in Daisy's life. Presumably, in the fluid American social ambience this deficiency might be less serious, but as he is well aware, the European system is predicated upon strict control: "A young man was not at liberty to speak to a young unmarried lady except under certain rarely-occurring conditions" (*Tales*, IV, 145). When the excursion to Chillon is proposed, Mrs. Miller's assertion that Daisy had better go alone strikes Winterbourne as "a very different type of maternity from that of the vigilant matrons of Geneva" (*Tales*, IV, 164). Daisy herself is described as an "unprotected daughter," a condition she shares with a number of James's young heroines. When Winterbourne hears of fortune hunters gathered around Daisy in Rome, his first question is "Where is the mother?" (*Tales*, I, 172). He soon discovers that although Mrs. Miller is physically present, she has no ability to evaluate her daughter's behavior or even to determine precisely what it is. On the issue of Daisy's possible engagement to Giovanelli, "the state of mind of Daisy's mamma struck him as so unprecedented in the annals of parental vigilance that he gave up as utterly irrelevant the attempt to place her upon her guard" (*Tales*, IV, 197). Only Daisy's deathbed message to Winterbourne settles for her mother the question of an engagement.

When Daisy is made aware of the social consequences of her behavior in Rome she appeals to Winterbourne, not her mother. Winterbourne is in a position to help Daisy, but he is too ambivalent about his feelings for her to be effective. Instead, he prefers the safer role of surrogate son to his aunt, a mother whose own children avoid her presence: "Her nephew, who had come up to Vevey expressly to see her, was therefore more attentive than those who, as she said, were nearer to her. He had imbibed at Geneva the idea that one must

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be attentive to one's aunt" (*Tales*, IV, 155). Winterbourne carries this attentiveness too far when he accedes to his aunt's version of Daisy's character over his own instinctive impression of her innocence.

Without the commitment shown by true surrogates such as Mr. Longdon and Mrs. Wix, Winterbourne cannot wield the authority necessary to control Daisy. Preferring the societal role of judge, he condemns Daisy rather than becoming a surrogate kinsman-rescuer. Lacking such support, Daisy cannot survive in a hostile and predatory society; she is, in her own comparison, like a Christian martyr brought to the Colosseum to be devoured by lions and tigers. When Daisy is assured of Winterbourne's indifference to her, she chooses to die. Her defiant assertion of strength—"'I never was sick, and I don't mean to be'"—is transformed into the defiance of abandonment: "'I don't care . . . whether I have Roman fever or not'" (*Tales*, IV, 203, 204).

If not as "unnatural" as the dereliction of mothers, paternal failure is still a serious violation of kinship bonds. Such failure is at the center of *Washington Square*, enshrined in Dr. Sloper's inability to accept his daughter as she is and in his intransigence toward her one attempt to assert her individuality. That Dr. Sloper's assessment of Catherine's suitor is more percipient than hers hardly excuses his insensitivity towards his daughter, whom "he almost never addressed . . . save in the ironical form."[18] Far from saving her from a fortune hunter out of affection, or even painful duty, Dr. Sloper takes a cruel pleasure in his role, subconsciously punishing Catherine because she is "an inadequate substitute for his lamented first-born, of whom he had promised himself to make an admirable man," and for his wife, whose death had been caused by Catherine's birth (p. 83).

Catherine's misfortune is compounded by the dubious support of a surrogate far more harmful than helpful. Foolish, credulous, incurably romantic, Aunt Penniman is easily manipulated by Morris Townsend into preferring his interests to those of her niece: "Sentimentally speaking . . . she had (though she had not disinherited her niece) adopted Morris Townsend. . . . She would have been very happy to have a handsome and tyrannical son, and would have taken an extreme

[18] *Selected Fiction*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Dutton, 1953), p. 102. Further references to this edition of *Washington Square* will be given parenthetically in the text.

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interest in his love affairs" (p. 237). *Washington Square* illustrates the bleakness of double failure within the paradigm of kinship displacement: the effects of parental failure are intensified by the failure of Dr. Sloper's surrogate.[19]

3

The Portrait of a Lady, a study of selfishly motivated surrogation masquerading as altruism, has a more complex structure than the fictions we have been considering because Isabel Archer plays the dual role of victim and surrogate. Isabel links two families in a doubled pattern: she is taken into the Touchett household as the orphaned niece of Mrs. Touchett; she then enters the Osmond household to become a surrogate mother for her husband's child. Isabel is singled out by her aunt for a limited commitment of kinship: Mrs. Touchett will show her four European countries and allow her to perfect her French. Ralph Touchett, Isabel's cousin, sees an opportunity for greater involvement; he persuades his father to undertake a paternal obligation toward Isabel by providing for her financially. Neither Mrs. Touchett nor her son is disinterested. In Mrs. Touchett's opinion, "For a woman of my age there's no greater convenience, in some ways, than an attractive niece" (*NY*, III, 56-57). Though more complex, Ralph's motives in arranging for Isabel to inherit a fortune are also not completely altruistic. He wants Isabel to be free, but at the same time he admits a novelist-like amusement in observing her actions in her newly gained identity.

Isabel acquires wealth, but not the context of kinship which would help her use it wisely. Ralph continues to observe her life with interest and curiosity: "He found much entertainment in the idea that in these few months of his knowing her he should observe a fresh suitor at her gate" (*NY*, III, 395). Even after her marriage, when he suspects her unhappiness, he persists in his spectator's stance of curious *voyeur*. Discussing Isabel with Lord Warburton, Ralph remarks: "'It's an interesting question—how far her fondness for Pansy will carry her'" (*NY*, IV, 153). Since one of Isabel's prin-

[19] This is also true in *The Bostonians* where Verena Tarrant passes from the hands of her parents, incompetent exploiters, into the hands of a more competent exploiter, the surrogate Olive Chancellor. *The Bostonians* ends with Verena's escape from her surrogate kin into a problematic marriage.

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cipal illusions is that she is totally self-sufficient, she reciprocates by maintaining her distance from Ralph. When he does attempt to approach her with a declaration of affection, she recoils with the thought, "Was he too on that tiresome list [of suitors]?" (*NY*, IV, 71-72). Isabel's relationship with Ralph is undermined by the ambiguity of his role: is he indeed a kinsman or (only) a possible lover?[20] Only when he is dying can Ralph and Isabel see each other truly as kin. After an ecstatic reconciliation Isabel exclaims: "'Oh my brother!'" Full commitment comes too late either to keep Ralph alive or to save Isabel.[21]

Significantly, one of the attractions of Gilbert Osmond for Isabel, as Mrs. Touchett anticipates, is the role of stepmother to his daughter Pansy: "'We shall have my niece arriving at the conviction that her mission in life's to prove that a stepmother may sacrifice herself—and that, to prove it, she must first become one'" (*NY*, III, 398). Isabel's commitment to Pansy deflects her from her own failure; moreover, the commitment is vitiated by Isabel's submission to Pansy's egocentric father. Like the adult Claire de Cintré, Pansy is the victim of a selfishly motivated parent who makes or unmakes a daughter's marriage for reasons of personal policy.[22] Isabel allows herself to be Osmond's tool in pressuring Pansy to give up the man she loves for a man she does not love and who does not love her: "It seemed to Isabel that if she could make it her duty to bring about such an event she should play the part of a good wife. She wanted to be that; she wanted to be able to believe sincerely, and with proof of it, that she had been that" (*NY*, IV, 174). Isabel's promise not to desert Pansy is the most telling measure of her diminished reality: she cannot save the girl; her presence will simply make it easier for Pansy to accept paternal coercion.

[20] Such ambiguity also surrounds Olive Chancellor's role in *The Bostonians*.

[21] Ralph's dying injunction to Caspar Goodwood—"'Do everything you can for her'" (*NY*, IV, 432)—is his attempt to pass on the commitment of kinship which he has not fulfilled.

[22] The drama of Pansy's courtship centers around Osmond, who refers to himself as a man trying to marry his daughter to a lord. He is first expectant, then disappointed. When Isabel mentions Pansy's feelings, Osmond dismisses them as irrelevant. Isabel tells him: "'Pansy doesn't care for him [Lord Warburton]. She's very glad he's gone.'" Osmond replies: "'That has nothing to do with the matter'" (*NY*, IV, 276).

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Leaving her own inadequate kin, Isabel has created a family based upon false appearances engendered by her own ignorance and Osmond's skillful deception.[23] When she penetrates this façade, Isabel then chooses to participate in its fraudulence: the "straight path" is the perseverance in crookedness, a return to the empty forms of her marriage.

4

The Ambassadors is James's only fiction which exclusively focuses upon the role of surrogate. As the fullest delineation of this figure, Lambert Strether best sums up the characteristics of this Jamesian prototype. James's surrogates are inevitably conscious of a void in their lives; they can respond to the needs of a young person bereft of kin because as mature people they have learned to adjust to their own deprivation. Mr. Longdon had loved and lost, and the loss remained absolute and unmitigated until he intervened in Nanda's life. Mrs. Wix was existing in a state of permanent mourning for her dead child when she became Maisie's governess. James originally intended a similar treatment of Strether, whose own parental failure and loss were to have constituted a prominent theme: "Deep and silent penance has he privately performed ever since, and the loss of his son, and the particular conditions and particular consequent feelings, are things that have constituted one of the sharpest elements of his life."[24] In keeping with the more ample portraiture that the developing novel required, James changed the original conception of Strether by making him conscious of a more diffused sense of loss: by not living fully when he was young, Strether has lost life itself.

The formidable Mrs. Newsome of Woollett, Massachusetts, dispatches Strether to reassert parental authority over her straying son. She believes that Chad has been seduced by a "wicked woman," but in spite of the sexual nature of her liaison with Chad, Madame de Vionnet is in many respects a surrogate mother to the young man. She is considerably older than he is, the mother of a child who is almost grown. More significantly, as an urbane teacher who instructs Chad in the art of living, she acts as a foil to the authoritarian and puri-

[23] Like Osmond and Madame Merle, Isabel is a worshipper of appearances. After admitting her unhappiness to Henrietta, she continues: "'But I can't publish my mistake. I don't think that's decent. I'd much rather die'" (*NY*, IV, 284).

[24] *Notebooks*, p. 382.

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tanical mother who wants to repossess her son so that he can embark upon a moneymaking career. Madame de Vionnet has truly fostered Chad's growth; his mother would restrict it to the narrow terms of Woollett.[25] When Strether finds Chad "greatly improved," he replaces the image of erring youth that Mrs. Newsome has projected with Madame de Vionnet's vision of Chad's cultivation. Consequently, he arrives at a conclusion diametrically opposed to Mrs. Newsome's—Chad must remain in Paris.

Although Strether's relationship of consort to Mrs. Newsome makes him a potential surrogate father to Chad, he becomes more emphatically a surrogate kinsman of Madame de Vionnet. She is responsible for Chad's astonishing transformation; she and the city of Paris, which Madame de Vionnet reflects and represents, are responsible for Strether's equally astonishing change of purpose. After confessing his admiration of her, Strether is led to oppose his own self-interest; he counsels Chad in the strongest terms: "'You'll be a brute you know—you'll be guilty of the last infamy—if you ever forsake her'" (*NY*, XXII, 308).

Strether's inability to perceive the sexual nature of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship overtly manifests kinship displacement. Strether comes to Paris convinced that Chad is entangled in just such a stereotypical affair; in order to sympathize rather than condemn he must purge the situation of that reductive aspect and view Madame de Vionnet, as she in fact is, as a maternal figure, a rival of Mrs. Newsome in role as well as in power. As a mother nurturing Chad culturally, she can be enthusiastically supported by Strether and even recommended to the sensibility of Woollett as a beneficent influence upon its native son. However naive, Stether's view has its own truth. The sexual attachment will indeed pass (Chad intimates that he is already restless), but the polish and cultivation Madame de Vionnet is responsible for will endure.[26]

[25] James's "Project of Novel" for *The Ambassadors* stresses the commercial motive of Strether's mission: "The bustling business at home, the mercantile mandate, the counter, the ledger, the bank, the 'advertising interest' embody mainly the special phase of civilization to which he must recall his charge" (*Notebooks*, p. 396).

[26] The extent of Madame de Vionnet's influence, both now and in the future, may well be questioned, however. Prompted by Strether's doubts at the end of the novel, the reader may suspect that Chad's urbanity simply covers a void. The essential Chad—superficial and morally unengaged—may indeed be unaltered, but it is still difficult to believe that the mark of his relationship with Madame

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Ironically, Madame de Vionnet's benevolent tutelage does not extend to her own daughter. Although she has more subtlety and finesse than Mrs. Newsome, she, too, is a coercive and egotistical mother, who uses her daughter to advance her own interests.[27] Jeanne de Vionnet is first seen as a cover for Chad's relationship with her mother, who uses Jeanne to invite Strether to visit them and then asks him to speak favorably of her *and her daughter* to Mrs. Newsome. When Strether compliments Jeanne, Madame de Vionnet's maternal pleasure seems calculated: "The mother's eagerness with which Madame de Vionnet jumped at this was to come back to him later as beautiful in its grace. 'The dear thing *did* please you?' Then as he met it with the largest 'Oh!' of enthusiasm; 'She's perfect. She's my joy'" (*NY*, XXI, 254).[28] Later, Jeanne's being married off impresses Strether "as a move in a game" which administers a "sensible shock" to his partisanship of Madame de Vionnet (*NY*, XXII, 126, 129).

To be fully effective as a surrogate also demands a selfless commitment, a requirement that Strether meets more handsomely than other Jamesian surrogates because he acts not only for others but against his own material interests. Having gotten something for herself, Madame de Vionnet cannot be a permanent surrogate mother for Chad. She is aware, as she tells Strether, that the selfless—i. e., ideally maternal—role is the best: "'What it comes to is that it's not, that it's never, a happiness, any happiness at all, to *take*. The only safe thing is to give'" (*NY*, XXII, 282-83). Strether's selflessness is frankly puzzling to Chad, who has no scruples about "taking," and frustrating to Maria Gostrey, who would like to benefit personally from Strether's mission. In the novel's conclusion Strether explains to Maria that this quality is the essence of his character, one that makes him "right" by removing him from the exploitative nature of most relations: "'That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself'" (*NY*, XXII, 326).

de Vionnet will not remain in some attenuated form, if only in a lingering veneer of culture.

[27] On her side of the struggle Mrs. Newsome also uses her daughter. When Strether delays in capturing Chad, Sarah Pocock is sent to Paris. Sarah is a singleminded reflection of her mother, but in Chad's opinion she is merely an inferior copy of the original. "'Mother's worth fifty of Sally!'" he remarks (*NY*, XXII, 65).

[28] Osmond is similarly effusive in using his daughter to gain Isabel's sympathy: "'Ah,' cried Gilbert Osmund beautifully, 'she's a little saint of heaven! She is my great happiness'" (*NY*, III, 383).

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RONALD L. BOGUE*

Roland Barthes, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and the Paradise of the Writerly Text

Criticism, says Alexander Pope, should be "the Muse's Handmaid" (*An Essay on Criticism*, 1. 102). There is no better exemplification of this dictum than Roland Barthes' criticism of Alain Robbe-Grillet's early novels. Barthes' 1954 article "Littérature objective"[1] was one of the earliest tributes to Robbe-Grillet's first novel, *Les Gommes* (1953), and one of the clearest analyses of the revolutionary nature of Robbe-Grillet's achievement. (Many have argued, in fact, that Barthes is largely responsible for the reputation Robbe-Grillet has come to enjoy, and even claim that Barthes knew better than Robbe-Grillet what Robbe-Grillet wanted to do.)[2] Following the publication of Robbe-Grillet's next work, *Le Voyeur* (1955), Barthes again came to the novelist's defense, in an essay titled "Littérature littérale" (1955), and after the appearance of *La Jalousie* (1957), Robbe-Grillet's third novel, Barthes continued his staunch advocacy of Robbe Grillet's work in the essay "Il n'y a pas d'école Robbe-Grillet" (1958).[3] Yet when examined in the light of the rest of Barthes' criticism, these essays on Robbe-Grillet seem to be, not selfless oblations of a handmaid for her muse, but local instances of a general obsession that shapes Barthes' work. Throughout his career, Barthes has fixed his varied theoretical speculations on a belief in the existence of, or at least in the possibility of the existence of, an innocent, open text, free of the constraints of ideology. This text goes by different names: in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953), it is the zero-degree text; in Barthes' exploration of the mythical

* Ronald L. Bogue is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia. He has published on Pope's aesthetic and is working on a book dealing with the European verse *ars poetica* as a literary form.

[1] Reprinted in *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), pp. 29-40 [*Critical Essays*, tr. Richard Howard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 13-24].

[2] See, for example, Mathieu Galey in *Arts*, 9 April 1964, and Dominique Rolin in *Le Point*, 6 March 1973 (cited by Philip Thody in *Roland Barthes: A Conservative Estimate* [Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1977], p. 161).

[3] *Essais critiques*, pp. 63-70 and 101-05 (*Critical Essays*, pp. 51-58 and 91-95).

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dimensions of modern popular customs, *Mythologies* (1957), it is the text that resists all mythologization; it is the authorless text in "La Mort de l'auteur" (1968); in *S/Z* (1970), his masterful study of a Balzac short story, it is the writerly text; and in his aphoristic meditation on the experience of reading, *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973), it is the text of *jouissance* (a combination of bliss, pleasure and orgasm).[4] It is clear, I believe, that Robbe-Grillet's early novels were for Barthes, simply further manifestations of this open and free text. Robbe-Grillet apparently did not sense that his novels were functioning as accessories to someone else's project, however, for he adopted many of Barthes' arguments in his own essays on his novels in the 1950's. He did abandon the Barthesian defense of his works in 1961, just as Barthes, in 1962, gave signs of recognizing the disparity between his interpretations of Robbe-Grillet's novels and the novels themselves, but for several years he found in Barthes an articulate spokesman for his own views. It is to this exemplary relationship between critic and novelist that I wish to direct my attention, and in particular to the role of theory as a common bond between the critic and the novelist and as a provocation to further development in the work of each.

In "Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui" (1963), Robbe-Grillet observes that the modern critic is in a difficult position, for "he is obliged to judge contemporary works by employing criteria which, at best, do not concern them."[5] He suggests that modern criticism "extrapolate": "taking as its foundation the historical evolution of forms and of their significations, in the Western novel, for example, criticism can attempt to imagine what tomorrow's

[4] I am indebted to Professor Stanley Fish for the identification of this theme in Barthes' work. A useful, if somewhat simplistic, treatment of Barthes' criticism is Philip Thody's *Roland Barthes: A Conservative Estimate*. Quite valuable is Stephen Heath's *Vertige du déplacement: lecture de Barthes* (Paris: Fayard, 1974). Also interesting is Louis-Jean Calvert's *Roland Barthes: un regard politique sur le signe* (Paris: Payot, 1973).

[5] In *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 156. Throughout my essay, I cite readily available translations of French texts, in this case *For A New Novel*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 144. When page references are included in the text, the translation page number is followed by the French page number in italics, e. g., p. 144; *156*. All essays by Robbe-Grillet cited in the text are collected in *Pour un nouveau roman*, and text citations will be to this edition and the Howard translation.

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significations will be, and then to offer a provisional judgment as to the forms the artist affords it today" (p. 144; *156*). Robbe-Grillet's advice is aptly fulfilled in Barthes' first book, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, which appeared in the same year as Robbe-Grillet's first novel. Barthes offered a broad history of the French novel and a programme for its development that anticipated in many ways the work of Robbe-Grillet. We must briefly examine the argument of *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, for only in the context of this work is Barthes' criticism of Robbe-Grillet fully intelligible.

The literary theory Barthes proposes in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* is essentially a development of and a response to the views Sartre presents in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947).[6] Barthes accepts Sartre's neo-Hegelian, existential Marxism; he agrees that freedom and commitment should be the central concerns of modern artists; but he finds Sartre's conception of *engagement* in prose fiction naive and limiting. For Barthes, radical experiments with form are not signs of bourgeois decadence, as Sartre seems to believe, but necessary responses to the problematic status of literature and literary language in the modern world. Writers who express a revolutionary message in a traditional fictional mode sabotage their own enterprise, for they ignore the history which informs and compromises the institution of literature and its conventions. Barthes believes that French literature and the French language solidify around 1650. In the 16th and early 17th centuries several literary languages exist, since no formal codification of language restricts them, but when French starts to become standardized—when, for instance, the Academy is formed and the Port-Royal *Grammaire* appears—literature too becomes fixed. Despite variations in genre and style, one literary language, at once ornamental and instrumental, dominates: it uses ornament, not to explore the world, as did Rabelais and Corneille, but to serve as a ritual sign of literature's

[6] Susan Sontag makes this point in her Preface to the English translation of *Writing Degree Zero*, tr. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), pp. x-xiii. Sartre's basic ideas about *engagement* in prose fiction are detailed in the first chapter of *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 11-48 (*What Is Literature?*, tr. Bernard Frechtman [New York: Harper and Row, 1965], pp. 1-31). All quotations from *Writing Degree Zero* are from the Lavers and Smith translation. French page references (italicized) are to *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture et Eléments de sémiologie* (Paris: Gothier, 1964).

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presence; it purports to be a transparent instrument of thought, and thus is the perfect vehicle of an essentialized view of man which sees him as everywhere and always the same. This language, however, is not universal, Barthes argues, but bourgeois, just as the human nature in which its writers believe is not ubiquitous, but reflective of the class mores of those who construct that nature. Yet literature at this time is not problematic because the class ideologies of writers and their language are identical. Toward the end of the 18th century this language's transparency becomes clouded, but only in the 1850's do writers become aware of literature as a class institution. Three historical facts—"the demographic expansion in Europe, the replacement of textile by heavy industry, . . . the scission (completed by the revolution of June 1848) of French society into three mutually hostile classes" (p. 60; *53*)—force bourgeois writers to recognize the existence of ideologies that call into question the assumptions behind the conventions of literature. Henceforth, Barthes states, "Whenever the writer assembles a network of words it is the existence of Literature itself which is called into question" (p. 61; *54*). The attitude the writer adopts toward literature is "the initial act whereby the writer acknowledges or repudiates his bourgeois condition" (p. 61; *53*). Barthes isolates three responses to the problem, represented by Flaubert, Mallarmé and Camus. Flaubert accepts his bourgeois fate with tragic resignation, but he tries to redeem literature by making it a precious object, honestly artificial, yet valuable because of the laborious craftmanship which produces it. Mallarmé further objectifies literature, but he also attempts to create the possibility of a new language by destroying linguistic conventions of expectation in hopes of granting the word a free play of indeterminate significance. Camus adopts a colorless, neutral mode of writing, which Barthes calls the zero degree of writing, in an effort to create a writing that bears no sign of literature, that declares literature's absence.

Barthes' exposition of his history is far from clear, but the mythic dimension of this history and its purpose are obvious: to justify a particular mode of writing, he constructs a past in which a period of decadent harmony (1650-1850) gives way to an age of tragic struggle (1850-1950), during which a rather esoteric revolutionary elite comes to the fore, which is followed by an era of redeemed, classless harmony (1950 on), made possible only by writers' devotion to experiments with literary form. That his history aspires to a millenial future

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is explicitly demonstrated by his remarks on the zero-degree style with which he closes his work. Contemporary writers seek this style, Barthes says, because "for them, the search for a non-style or an oral style, for a zero level or a spoken level of writing is, all things considered, the anticipation of a homogeneous social state; most of them understand that there can be no universal language outside a concrete, and no longer a mystical or merely nominal, universality of society" (p. 87; 75). Modern literary writing, "feeling permanently guilty of its own solitude, . . . is nonetheless an imagination eagerly desiring a felicity of words, it hastens towards a dreamed-of language whose freshness, by a kind of ideal anticipation, might portray the perfection of some new Adamic world where language would no longer be alienated. The proliferation of modes of writing brings a new Literature into being in so far as the latter invents its language only in order to be a project: Literature becomes the Utopia of Language" (p. 88; 76).

It is not surprising that Barthes admires the unimpassioned, unrhetorical style of Robbe-Grillet's descriptions of objects in *Les Gommes*, nor that he argues that these passages are central to an understanding of Robbe-Grillet's art. Barthes' zero-degree style seems well represented by the blank enumeration of characteristics of unimportant objects Robbe-Grillet provides, such as the famous tomato wedge the hero of *Les Gommes* observes in an automat:

> A quarter of tomato that is quite faultless, cut up by the machine into a perfectly symmetrical fruit.
>
> The peripheral flesh, compact, homogeneous, and a splendid chemical red, is of an even thickness between a strip of gleaming skin and the hollow where the yellow, graduated seeds appear in a row, kept in place by a thin layer of greenish jelly along a swelling of the heart. This heart, of a slightly grainy, faint pink, begins—toward the inner hollow—with a cluster of white veins, one of which extends towards the seeds—somewhat uncertainly.
>
> Above, a scarcely perceptible accident has occurred: a corner of the skin, stripped back from the flesh for a fraction of an inch, is slightly raised.[7]

[7] *The Erasers*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp. 152-53. Robbe-Grillet's French text is worth reproducing:

"Un quartier de tomate en vérité sans défaut, découpé à la machine dans un fruit d'une symétrie parfaite.

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But beside exemplifying a zero-degree style, Robbe-Grillet's object descriptions also fulfill the aim to which, Barthes argues, modern poetry aspires. In *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Barthes characterizes modern poetry by its disruption of the complacent logical flow of traditional literary language, which isolates the Word so that "it shines with an infinite freedom and prepares to radiate towards innumerable uncertain and possible connections" (p. 47; *44*). This aspect of modern poetry, he continues,

> implies a reversal in our knowledge of Nature. The interrupted flow of the new poetic language initiates a discontinuous Nature, which is revealed only piecemeal. At the very moment when the withdrawal of functions obscures the relations existing in the world, the object in discourse assumes an exalted place: modern poetry is a poetry of the object. In it, Nature becomes a fragmented space, made of objects solitary and terrible, because the links between them are only potential. Nobody chooses for them a privileged meaning, or a particular use, or some service; nobody imposes a hierarchy on them, nobody reduces them to the manifestation of a mental behavior, or of an intention, of some evidence of tenderness, in short. (pp. 49-50; *46*)

In his essay "Littérature objective," Barthes says that Robbe-Grillet's language is the antithesis of poetic language, but Robbe-Grillet's handling of objects clearly serves the same end as poetic writing—that of separating man from Nature and refusing to let him appropriate Nature as a part of himself. Robbe-Grillet, says Barthes, "intends to assassinate the classical object, . . . to isolate objects, to sever them from their function and from our biology. . . . What Robbe-Grillet seeks to destroy is therefore the adjective: qualification is never, in his

La chair périphérique, compacte et homogène, d'un beau rouge de chimie, est régulièrement épaisse entre une bande de peau luisante et la loge où sont rangés les pépins, jaunes, bien calibrés, maintenus en place par une mince couche de gelée verdâtre le long d'un renflement du coeur. Celui-ci, d'un rose atténué légèrement granuleux, débute, du côté de la dépression inférieure, par un faisceau de veines blanches, dont l'une se prolonge jusque vers les pépins—d'une façon peut-être un peu incertaine.

Tout en haut, un accident à peine visible s'est produit: un coin de pelure, décollé de la chair sur un millimètre ou deux, se soulève imperceptiblement" (*Les Gommes* [Paris: Editions de minuit, 1953], p. 161).

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writing, anything but spatial, situational, in no case analogical."[8] By restoring an independent life to things, Robbe-Grillet resists making the world a site of thematic or psychological depth, as does Balzac, for instance. Robbe-Grillet posits a reality prior to meaning. "The novel," says Barthes, "becomes a direct experience of man's surroundings, without this man's being able to fall back on a psychology, a metaphysic, or a psychoanalysis in order to approach the objective milieu he discovers" (pp. 23-24; *39*).

Barthes makes essentially the same point in his other articles on Robbe-Grillet: objects are at the heart of Robbe-Grillet's novels, and everything else in them is superfluous. Apparently Robbe-Grillet found this theory attractive, for in the mid 50's he also took up the cause of the object and many of his arguments made direct reference to Barthes'. Robbe-Grillet's theoretical writings are worth considering briefly, for they not only echo Barthes' thought, but they also extend and develop the implications of many of Barthes' points.

In "Une Voie pour le roman futur" (1956), Robbe-Grillet calls for a fiction that presents a world without signification:

> Let it be first of all by their *presence* that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this presence continue to prevail over whatever explanatory theory that may try to enclose them in a system of references, whether emotional, sociological, Freudian or metaphysical.
>
> In the future universe of the novel, gestures and objects will be *there* before being *something;* and they will still be there afterwards, hard, unalterable, eternally present, mocking their own 'meaning,' that meaning which vainly tries to reduce them to the role of precarious tools, of a temporary and shameful fabric woven exclusively—and deliberately—by the superior human truth expressed in it, only to cast out this awkward auxiliary into immediate oblivion and darkness. (p. 21; *23*)

In "Nature, humanisme, tragédie" (1958), Robbe-Grillet identifies the enemy of accurate description in fiction as the metaphor (by which he really means the pathetic fallacy). When an author speaks of the "majestic mountain" or the "pitiless sun" he sets up analogical relations which imply a communication between man and Nature.

[8] *Critical Essays*, pp. 16-17 (*Essais critiques*, pp. 32-33).

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Nature befalls man as a gift; he is its possessor (read: consumer, exploiter, capitalist). The physical world comes finally to signify a destiny for man: "this landscape existed *before* me; if it is really the landscape which is sad, it was *already* sad before me, and this correspondence I experience today between its form and my mood was here waiting for me long before I was born; this melancholy has been fated for me forever..." (p. 56; 62). Robbe-Grillet sees the metaphoric landscape as the perfect complement of the traditional narrative which reduces history to an ordered, logical progression toward an inexorable end. Through this narration, man's situation seems fated, his world an unalterable home and prison. (Sartre's attacks on humanism clearly inspire Robbe-Grillet at this point, as do Barthes' observations on the bourgeois ideology embedded in traditional literary techniques.) Robbe-Grillet proposes to counter literature's traditional appropriation of Nature by adopting a neutral language in his descriptions of the world, and, whenever possible, to use the language of physics, geometry and mathematics.[9] Nor must the non-human world alone submit to an unmetaphoric delineation: the novelist's characters must also attain a presence devoid of signification, as Robbe-Grillet states in "Une Voie pour le roman futur":

> As for the novel's characters, they may themselves suggest many possible interpretations; they may, according to the preoccupations of each reader, accommodate all kinds of comment—psychological, psychiatric, religious or political—yet their indifference to these 'potentialities' will soon be apparent. Whereas the traditional hero is constantly solicited, caught up, destroyed by these interpretations of the author's, ceaselessly projected into an immaterial and unstable *elsewhere*, always more remote and blurred, the future hero will remain, on the contrary, *there*. (p. 22; 24)

It would appear that Barthes' concentration on the Robbe-Grilletian object is an astute one: the ethos of presignificant presence seems to lead Robbe-Grillet to a reconsideration of all basic aspects of fiction—description, character, plot, narration. That Barthes senses a possible line of development in Robbe-Grillet's novels (or suggests one) cannot be doubted: objective description, which serves merely as an inter-

[9] See, for example, *Pour un nouveau roman*, pp. 78-80 (*For A New Novel*, pp. 71-73).

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mittent punctuation of the narrative in *Les Gommes*, becomes the predominant mode of *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie*. But what appraisal can be made of the theories themselves? The notion of a neutral description of reality which avoids evalution must be suspect. It seems to require a view of language like that Barthes discovers in the classical period of 1650-1850, when language is regarded as a transparent labeling of a previously apprehended reality. Robbe-Grillet's reliance on scientific language is no solution, for scientific language is merely a specialized conventional discourse which in our society has the status of objectivity. As Jürgen Habermas demonstrates in *Knowledge and Human Interest*, scientific language, far from being motiveless and disinterested, is essentially the tool of an instrumental knowledge which seeks to utilize the world.[10] One suspects that the invocation of scientific language primarily meets polemical ends: Robbe-Grillet affronts traditionalists who oppose literary and scientific language, and he accords his fiction the truth value usually granted scientific discourse, while, perhaps, undermining rational certainty by confusing the languages of truth and fiction. But even if a neutral language were available, an arbitrary selection of objects for description would be impossible.

Does the theory adequately describe the fiction? From the theory one would expect Robbe-Grillet's early novels to be mere lists of extraneous details, compendious catalogues. But one finds instead fascinating plots, intriguing characters and evocative settings. Robbe-Grillet rejects traditional plots, but his novels have definite stories.[11] In *Les Gommes* a detective tries to solve a murder that has not actually occurred, since an assassin's bullet has only wounded his victim, who in turn decides to fake his death. When the detective returns to the scene of the crime to surprise the murderer, who, he suspects, must recover some papers he left in his haste during the murder, the detective meets and shoots instead the intended victim of the assassination—thus, like Oedipus, becoming both detective and murderer. In *Le Voyeur* a watch salesman traverses an island selling his merchan-

[10] *Knowledge and Human Interests*, tr. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

[11] Robbe-Grillet recognizes this fact. In "Sur quelques notions périmées" ("On Several Obsolete Notions"), he says that "it is not the anecdote that is lacking, it is only its character of certainty, its tranquility, its innocence" (p. 33; *38*).

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dise, and during the course of the day he tortures and kills (and perhaps rapes) a thirteen-year-old girl. A few days later he leaves the island unapprehended. In *La Jalousie* a banana grower suspects his wife of infidelity with a neighbor; his wife and the neighbor go to town, spend the night and return, the affair having cooled—apparently since the neighbor has proved impotent. Perhaps these stories are unconventional, but they are coherent. Robbe-Grillet does abandon traditional emplotment, but for artistic, not theoretical ends: in *Les Gommes*, in order to establish an ironic perspective on the ignorant searchings of the characters, in *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie* to explore the dynamics of psychological time. Far from depriving his characters of psychological depth, in *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie*, at least, he puts the inner workings of his characters at the center of the book, though he refrains from authorial comment and the intrusion of programmed symptomatic memories and actions in his characters. The objects that fill these worlds do not engulf the characters and plots, but evoke moods and further characterization. One of Robbe-Grillet's great achievements is to create insistently affective settings fraught with thematic implications: the gray, dull gloom of the geometrical city bounded by a circular highway in *Les Gommes*; the stark, colorless circular island of *Le Voyeur*; the teeming tropical jungle surrounding the insular villa in *La Jalousie*. In *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie* objects become grouped in complexes associated with the protagonists' fixations, and the detailed descriptions in both works help characterize the major figures: the murderer in *Le Voyeur* approaches with an equal seriousness and thoroughness the details of his watch sales and those of the coverup of his murder; the husband of *La Jalousie* obsessively enumerates the elements of his surroundings in an attempt to account for his world and his wife.[12]

My intention is not to denigrate Robbe-Grillet's novels by proving that they are pseudo-*nouveaux romans*, but to suggest that theory functions differently for Robbe-Grillet than it does for Barthes. Clearly, for Robbe-Grillet theory is a tool for exploring future fictions and a means of allying himself with an audience and a

[12] My observations on the conventional elements in Robbe-Grillet's novels are far from new. Bruce Morrissette makes many of these points in pages 21-152 of *The Novels of Robbe-Grillet*, rev. and expanded ed. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), by far the best available study of Robbe-Grillet's works.

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tradition—that of twentieth-century *avant-garde* literature. He is, as he says, no "theoretician of the novel" (*Pour un nouveau roman*, p. 7; 7). His commitment to theory is strictly pragmatic since theory and practice are inevitably divided. "Each novelist, each novel must invent its form," he says (*Pour un nouveau roman*, p. 12; *12*), and as a result no theory can encompass a work's originality. Thus he is not averse to changing his theoretical stance if it becomes constricting and misleading, as he does in "Nouveau roman, homme nouveau" (1961), where he abandons the battle cry of objectivity and argues that his novels have always been totally subjective and concerned only with man and his position in the world (*Pour un nouveau roman*, pp. 133-42; *143-53*). For Barthes, on the contrary, theory provides a standard of judgment and a hope for the future of society. As a critical tool, Barthes' theory fails the novels, but we should not therefore dismiss his criticism. It obviously has a beneficent effect on Robbe-Grillet, and perhaps the text he thought he read in Robbe-Grillet has inspired other writers. But the major value of his criticism is that his arguments, by force of sheer ingenuity, unsettle traditional interpretations of the novels (such as my own) and open the possibility of new modes of reading. Consider, for instance, his approach to *Le Voyeur* (*Essais critiques*, p. 52; *64*). Barthes reduces the work's plot to a lesson about objects by pointing out that the sadistic murder is not narrated but inferred from the protagonist's later actions. The plot is, strictly speaking, the reader's creation; the murderer tries to remove the evidence of his crime and in the process converts meaningless objects into clues, just as the reader, to account for a narrative vacuum, intentionalizes an insignificant Nature. Even if one is not fully convinced, the thought that such a text might exist is intriguing.

Yet one senses occasionally that Barthes is persuaded less by Robbe-Grillet's novels than by the impetus of his own thoughts, and Barthes' relative inattention to Robbe-Grillet's works after 1957 perhaps attests to his own uneasiness at identifying Robbe-Grillet's novels as the open and free texts he seeks. Barthes does momentarily return to Robbe-Grillet in 1962 when he writes a preface for Bruce Morrissette's excellent book on Robbe-Grillet, and Barthes continues to praise Robbe-Grillet, but he does so in new and more complex terms. "Robbe-Grillet's (theoretical) error," Barthes says, "was merely to suppose that there is a *Dasein* of things, antecedent

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and exterior to language, which he believed literature was obliged to redisover in a final impulse of realism. As a matter of fact, anthropologically, things signify immediately, always, and with good reason; and it is precisely because signification is their 'natural' condition that, by simply stripping them of their meaning, literature can affirm itself as an admirable artifice: if 'nature' signifies, it can be a certain acme of 'culture' to make it 'designify'." [13] Though Barthes attributes the theoretical error to Robbe-Grillet, we should recognize it as his own. The real here becomes problematic for Barthes, and the hope of direct access to it through a zero-degree style proves an illusion. Clearly this is not a sudden illumination, for in a 1961 interview Barthes asks, "Yet, what is the *real*? We never know it except in the form of effects (physical world), functions (social world), or fantasies (cultural world); in short, the *real* is never anything but an inference." [14] Since the real cannot be known directly, it must be apprehended through conventions which immediately fill the world with significations. Barthes argues that Robbe-Grillet's art designifies reality, but we must regard this praise as nostalgic indulgence, for Robbe-Grillet's medium is compromised, inasmuch as language is the signifying institution *par excellence*. In the same interview, Barthes says that

> literature is never anything but language, its being is in language; now language is already, anterior to any literary treatment, a system of meaning: even before being literature, it implies particularity of substances (the words), discontinuity, selection, categorization, special logic .... Further, these simple words are themselves values, they have a past, associations, their meaning is born perhaps less from their relation to the object they signify than from their relation to other words, at once adjacent and different: and it is precisely in this zone of oversignification, of secondary signification, that literature will be lodged and will develop. (pp. 159-60; *164*).

Barthes can honor Robbe-Grillet's work as he does only because he has not at this point understood the implications of his discoveries, and though he never does fully realize—or admit—the consequences of his

[13] "Le Point sur Robbe-Grillet?" ("The Last Word on Robbe-Grillet?"), in *Essais critiques*, p. 204 (*Critical Essays*, p. 203).

[14] "La Littérature, aujourd'hui" ("Literature Today"), in *Essais critiques*, pp. 163-64 (*Critical Essays*, p. 159).

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views of language and reality, by 1970 he has sufficiently exposed the problematics of his theory to make his remarks on Robbe-Grillet untenable. What happens to Barthes in the 60's is that he discovers semiology, or the study of sign systems. One might date his interest in the subject from *Mythologies*, for in that book Barthes turns from the promulgation of revolutionary literature to the critique of conventional forms of communication, and from strictly literary analysis to the interpretation of various cultural phenomena, ranging from Wrestling and Plastic to the Face of Garbo and the Brain of Einstein. Many of the concerns of *Writing Degree Zero* do persist: in this work he believes his task is to expose the mythical nature of bourgeois ideology, whose basic ploy is to treat its self-interested conventions as natural ways of construing the world, and he still sees *avant-garde* literature as a free medium.[15] But what is new in *Mythologies* is his attempt to decipher the messages culture communicates, and in this sense his theory of myth is a proto-semiology. All that is missing is the concept of system, and this he finds later in linguistics. When the linguist Saussure coined the term *semiology*, he considered the possibility that language might eventually be regarded as simply one among many systems of signs, but when Barthes begins exploring the concept of semiology (around 1963) he discovers that linguistics, far from being a minor constituent of the field, provides the basic model for studying all signs.[16] Everywhere he looks he sees systems of cultural signification resembling languages, which, to avoid confusion, he calls *codes*. The alimentary code, the furniture code, the fashion code (which Barthes makes the subject of a book-length study in 1965)—all have vocabularies, grammars, and syntaxes which coherently organize realms of experience. And as Barthes pursues his analyses, the codification of reality appears so extensive that he finally concludes that man lives exclusively in a world of codes.[17] One might say that as the infant enters the human community he builds

[15] See the final essay of *Mythologies*, "Le Mythe, aujourd'hui," pp. 193-247 ("Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, tr. Annette Lavers [New York: Hill and Wang, 1972], pp. 109-59).

[16] Barthes' views on semiology are succinctly expressed in his "Eléments de sémiologie" (1964), in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture et Elémens de sémiologie*.

[17] Barthes' short essay "Style and Its Image," in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. Seymour Chatman (London and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 3-15, provides a clear exposition of this idea.

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the world by learning systems of structuration which give reality its meaning and shape. He becomes fully human only when his world is fully coded. (Not that he has individual labels for every element of experience, but that he has mental maps which can categorize any experience, even if only into categories such as "irrational," "uncanny," "inexplicable.") The major vehicle of codification is, of course, language, which might be called a coded collocation of codes. Language has its own rules of operation, but it also bears the trace of all other codes, in that the concepts it denotes are themselves encoded.

Clearly this theory of language makes a colorless, zero-degree style impossible, just as it does a designifying literature. The naturalization of cultural paradigms, which Barthes so opposes in *Mythologies*, proves to be a universal, rather than a bourgeois, phenomenon, and thus an escape from it can no longer be the goal of a revolutionary writing. Consequently, Barthes invents a new ideal text—the writerly text—which receives its clearest exposition in *S/Z*.

S/Z is perhaps Barthes' most stunning single performance, and certainly the best introduction to his concept of language as a collection of codes. In *S/Z* Barthes breaks a Balzac short story into some 561 fragments which he then analyzes by identifying the various codes at play in the text. The number of elements he decodes is impressive, and the number of coded elements he ignores is even more impressive, but Barthes argues that the Balzac text ultimately partakes of a limited range of codes which points to a single meaning and, in a sense, closes the text. What Barthes longs for is an open text: not one that escapes codes entirely, but one that maintains a free play of codes which never becomes fixed. This is the writerly text. Barthes says that "in this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*. . . ; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language." [18] A reader cannot passively consume this text,

[18] *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), pp. 11-12 (*S/Z*, tr. Richard Miller [New York: Hill and Wang, 1974], pp. 5-6).

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but must produce the text and make reading "a labor of language," as Barthes says. In short, to read the writerly text is to write it.

I find Barthes' theory problematic on two counts: he reifies the text, and he deifies the reader. When Barthes speaks of the writerly text he clearly conceives of the text as a process rather than an entity. This type of text only comes into existence in the act of reading, in the reader's apprehension of the visual artefact. Yet if this is the case, then the writerly text is not a written work but a way of reading, and any book can be converted into a writerly text. How, then, can a text close interpretation—that is, enforce a mode of reading—unless that text is conceived as a fixed entity with a determinate meaning independent of any reader's interpretation of it? But this question is merely the obverse of another: How can a reader create an infinitely plural text without encompassing all codes himself? In *S/Z*, Barthes purports to be the enemy of the transcendental ego; he claims that the self is merely the locus of codes, an entity constituted by codes. But if this is so, the reader who produces the writerly text must be one who can also stand outside the codes, who can place himself in all circumstances, follow all meanings and privilege none. This reader clearly must be a god.

These two inconsistencies are related: Barthes obviously recognizes the fact that most works of literature do seem to afford a limited number of interpretations, but he wants to protect the reader from any complicity in this limitation. A much more consistent approach would be to maintain the notion of the text as the interaction of the reader and the written word, but to admit that readers are limited, both by their situations, which must always be finite and concrete (since they are not gods), and by the conventions of language, literature and reading. If Barthes were to adopt this position, he could admit the existence of closed texts without granting language a transcendental meaning (which would make the Word God), since the limits on meaning would merely be imposed by the context of the work's apprehension. But this is a solution Barthes refuses.

In *S/Z* Barthes reaches an impasse: the ideological conventions he has sought to expose proliferate until they engulf the world; the neutral writing he thought he found in Robbe-Grillet's novels is compromised by his own understanding of language; and the free text he has envisaged falls prey to the reader's limitations. Yet Barthes continues his quest for the polysemous reading that writes

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the text in *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973), striving there to enlarge himself as a reader to create the prospect of a new language, and in his latest books, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975) and *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977), Barthes extends the quest by abandoning the analysis of texts *per se* for the exploration of the activities of Barthes the reader. One suspects that if the perfect reader must be a god, Barthes will become one. Often one senses that Barthes realizes his task is impossible, but he persists—and with good reason. His dream text may not exist, but he can imagine it, describe its experience, detail its psychology, savor its pleasures. He no longer needs Robbe-Grillet's novels or the works of anyone else, for he is writing his own novel of a critic trying to live in the paradise of the writerly text.

In a sense, Barthes' ideal always treads the brink of impossibility. Throughout his work, an analytic intelligence fashions constraining systems of interpretation which an energetic imagination attempts to escape. Even in *Writing Degree Zero*, the rigor of his critique of literature's status forces the ideal to assume a paradoxical, elusive guise. When Barthes identifies Robbe-Grillet's novels with the zero-degree text, Barthes' ideal is not concretized; instead, Robbe-Grillet's novels are subsumed within the luminous world of Barthes' linguistic dreams. It is no wonder that Robbe-Grillet finds Barthes' theories attractive, for they give his novels the status of transcendental wish-fulfillments which can sustain an artist in his labors and help him believe in his own future. That Barthes abandons the analysis of Robbe-Grillet's novels is not surprising, for Barthes never really needs the novels. The rudimentary characteristics of the novels he studies have already been extrapolated from his own work before the analysis begins. Thus one might say that in all his criticism Barthes creates the writerly text, only making it the object of his study in his later works. Perhaps I have been unfair in focusing my analytic attention on the most vulnerable portion of Barthes' works, since much of his criticism can be appreciated without reference to his concepts of the ideal, but I believe that recognition of the contradictions inherent in Barthes' ideal is essential to an understanding of its function. Barthes' ideal is the antipode of his analytic genius, that which assures Barthes the critic, after dissecting the world, a home where he can enjoy infinite play.

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Book Reviews

Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust by Paul de Man. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979. Pp. xi + 305. $19.50.

Allegories of Reading, Paul de Man's latest book, is in many ways related to his earlier collection of essays, *Blindness and Insight*. In the earlier work, de Man showed how the principle underlying the work of several important critics was capable of illuminating texts precisely because the critic was unaware of a contradiction at the heart of the insight. De Man argued, for example, that Georg Lukacs' itinerary in the *Theory of the Novel* sought to abolish the concept of organicity from the novel while at the same time reinstating an organic conception through the mode of temporality which was used to elaborate the supposedly non-organic theory. The insight which appears to abolish the concept, and the insight that generates the brilliant readings of various novels, thus only displaces the concept, leading to an inherent contradiction in the reading.

Allegories of Reading is not based on thematic or critical principles, as *Blindness and Insight* was, but instead it moves into a broader arena of contradiction as de Man investigates the relationship between grammar, the syntactic, metonymic placement of signifiers in a chain, and rhetoric, the tropes that are placed within the syntactic structure. The book begins by pointing out that most of the recent work done in this area by writers like Todorov, Barthes and Genette has assumed from the very beginning that rhetoric is only a part of grammar and hence consonant with its rules. And since rhetoric is seen only as a part of the grammar, the assumption of these writers is that once the rules for the grammar have been developed, rhetoric will be accounted for as well. For de Man, however, this consonance between rhetoric and grammar needs to be called into question, and the result of such questioning is an elaboration of the irony of understanding which places rhetoric and grammar at odds much in the same way that the insight of critics seemed to be contradicted by a blindness in de Man's earliest essays. His deconstructive readings demonstrate that grammar and rhetoric undermine each other rather than leading to understanding.

In using the terms "irony" and "deconstruction," de Man clearly places his work within the post-structuralist tradition, but his deconstructions bear the stamp of his own lucid writing. This is a text which continually undoes the relationship between grammar and trope, which continually demonstrates that the grammatical level is always deconstructed by the tropological level, leading finally to the view that any text contradicts its own premises and at the same time needs those premises to contradict itself and to reveal the contradiction. Through careful readings of Proust, Rilke, Nietzsche, and especially

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Rousseau, to whom the entire second half of the book is devoted, de Man elaborates his view that "A literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode..." (17), regardless of whether one attempts to ground the rhetoric in the grammar or the grammar in the rhetoric. In one sense, the work of *Allegories of Reading* is devoted to pursuing the lack of a ground within texts, a major theme of any deconstruction. Self, author, grammar, rhetoric and so on are each seen to be concepts which continually displace rather than ground a given reading of a text. The result of such readings is that all texts become fundamentally unreadable, hopelessly locked into an uncontrolled irony whose displacements it is impossible to stop. In another sense, though, de Man is also attempting to resolve some of the gaps and contradictions in previous readings of figures like Nietzsche and Rousseau. In Nietzsche's case, this is done through readings which find a contradiction in his work between performative language and representational language, a contradiction that does not appear only in the later work but which is present from the very beginning of Nietzsche's career. The reading then provides an important connection between early work like *The Birth of Tragedy* and later texts like *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The readings of Rousseau seek a deconstruction that accounts for the various philosophical, literary and autobiographical texts which unite them in their contradiction. Thus, each "essay" in the text offers new approaches to the figures under consideration and at the same time calls into question the readability of such work, and both are carefully and brilliantly evoked.

A brief glance at the commentary on Rousseau will indicate the position de Man outlines. The problem is first located in the *Discourse on the Origins and the Foundations of Inequality among Men*, a text that is problematic because it seems to blend both fiction and history in an inconsistent manner, leaving the reader unsure of its status—half seems devoted to a denominative history, half to a tropological fiction about human perfectability. The problem here is that it becomes "impossible to say whether denomination is literal or figural: from the moment there is denomination, the conceptual metaphor of entity as difference is implied, and whenever there is metaphor, the literal denomination of a particular entity is inevitable..." (148). And since the denomination, beginning with "man," is ultimately to lead to a political model as well, one must conclude that Rousseau's idea of the "political destiny of man is structured like and derived from a linguistic model that exists independently of nature and independently of the subject..." (156). Instead of basing his political model on the state of nature, then, Rousseau actually bases it on a linguistic model, and the negative aspects of social institutions thus parallel the confusion between literal and metaphorical language that is at the center of any linguistic system: the "circular, self-destructive pattern of all civil institutions mirrors the self-destructive epistemology of conceptual language when it demonstrates its inability to keep literal reference and figural connotation apart" (158). De Man's argument is more complex and detailed than this, but the basic point is simply that the political and the linguistic in Rousseau are both based on the inability properly to separate the literal from the metaphorical, leading to abuse within both networks.

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The *Second Discourse*, then, reveals the deconstructive principle inherent in all cognitive discourse: "it always has to be about an entity such as 'man' in which the noun is a conceptual metaphor that replaces a delusive play between identity and difference" (160). De Man then proceeds to discuss other works of Rousseau and to demonstrate how this principle undoes the self/other polarity and those other dichotomies through which we try to order and ground our world. With respect to reading itself, we find that "The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration" (205). We are caught between "allegorical narratives" which "tell the story of the failure to read" and "tropological narratives" which "tell the story of the failure to denominate" (205). What de Man shows us in each of his chapters on Rousseau is how the same aporia occurs regardless of the concept or the figure involved. Though at various times it is "judgment," "will" or "freedom" which is being considered, the result is always the same: the concept "operates deconstructively as a principle of differentiation but then, because of the referentiality inherent in the linguistic model, reintegrates by an act of the mind what it had taken apart on the level of intuition" (240). The unifying principle in Rousseau's work is that it always functions in terms of this necessary confusion between literal and metaphorical.

The object of *Allegories of Reading* is thus on the one hand to provide a commentary which deals with presumed differences and problems inherent in the criticism of each of the texts under consideration, revealing a coherence in the reading, and on the other hand to demonstrate that the coherence is finally a variation on the same theme: "There can be no text without grammar: the logic of grammar generates texts only in the absence of referential meaning, but every text generates a referent that subverts the grammatical principle to which it owed its constitution" (269). In these terms, de Man's work is surely successful, and the clarity of his presentation adds to the value of the writing. His abject refusal to offer a general conclusion is curious, since the implication of the text is that the deconstructive enterprise is germaine not only to Rilke, Proust, Nietzsche and Rousseau but to all writing, and a summary of "the systematic undoing...of understanding" (301) would be most helpful. Nevertheless, the carefully wrought network of the reading works well enough on its own and provides its own justification. If it is true that all deconstructions take place in the readings themselves, one would still like to know how de Man's deconstructive itinerary differs from the work of Derrida and the other post-structuralists. *Allegories of Reading* certainly fits into this tradition, and it is also one of the better examples of such work, but the readings, while excellent in themselves, seem not to extend the principles of deconstruction very far, though they clearly put them to good use.

JAMES S. HANS

Kenyon College

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Satire's Persuasive Voice by Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979. Pp. 305. $15.00.

The authors of this book say the progress of their work "at times was as intricate and hazardous as a journey through the Minoan labyrinth." In a book whose jacket declares it to be "engagingly written," as well as both "literate and urbane," such phraseology nevertheless smacks a bit of the high-flown and pretentious. And does the blurb writer of a university press book nowadays feel the need to commend a professorial study for being "literate"? Apparently we have come to such a pass.

I start with the language of *Satire's Persuasive Voice* because it so frequently distracts and bothers me, and I start with two examples. In the first (p. 103), the authors maintain that Swift's "grimly circumscribed vision of London in *A Description of a City Shower* includes physical and spiritual degradation, moral filth and smells, the detritus of wasted lives and hopes:

> Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,
> Drown'd puppies, stinking sprats, all drench'd in mud,
> Dead cats and turnip-tops come tumbling down the flood."

Swift certainly here specifies, as the authors claim, "the grossness of reality," but I nevertheless fail to see any "*spiritual* degradation," any "*moral* filth and smells," any so-called "detritus of wasted *lives* and *hopes*" (except possibly the lives and hopes of cats, cattle, dogs and sprats), either in these lines or in the rest of the poem (in spite of the strained efforts of critics other than the Blooms to turn Swift's poem into some kind of divine malediction on the humankind of London). What I do see is adjectival language raised to empty display, and if it is not downright wrong and misleading, it is certainly not supported by evidence or analysis. Again, take the occasion (pp. 218, 220-21) when the authors describe the use of "the beast metaphor, through which human shortcomings are placed in an animal context or are viewed by animals with a clarity denied to erring man," and where they arrive at a conclusion that to me somehow manages to be, by turns, truistic, jejune, canting:

> As is true of all satire, however, the dramatically exaggerated [beast] metaphors should not be insisted upon as the satirist's literal understanding of the world. Rather, some common objective ground exists upon which we may be able to come to terms with animal satire even as provocative as that we have just seen [in Butler, Swift, Addison]. All three...share at least these attitudes: that communal man has failed; that his social and political institutions no longer reflect the best of which the human spirit and will are capable.

To point up the questionable rhetoric, and the occasional questionable conclusions, in this book is not to deny the intellectual vigor and breadth also exhibited in the authors' attempt to chart the currents of satire. If they have not always avoided eddies and whirlpools in the way of their so "hazardous" journey, they have nevertheless struggled to make so protean a subject as satire give up its various shapes, voices, impulses. The trouble is that satire's persuasive voice *is* so protean—fierce as fire, bland as still water, sweeter than

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honey, rough as a cob, and so it is no wonder if it should seem to slip, occasionally, from the pen of anyone who would dare so sweeping a treatment as is to be found in this study. The authors do recognize the elusiveness of their subject, do try to do justice to it not only in theory, but also in theme and practice. After their introduction, and the welcome emphasis in it on what they term the essential, "innate quality," of *humanitas* in the best kinds of satire, we are given three chapters on "Intention: Satiric Mode of Feeling"; "Shape and Order: 'How a Modern Satire Should be Made'"; "Apotropaic Visions: Satiric Tone and Meaning"; then come three chapters on "Religious Satire," "Political Satire," "Satire of Manners." As perhaps can be seen from these headings, however, there is inherent in the attempt to be both general and specific a good deal of overlapping, with all the possibilities of repetitiveness thereby inherent. Some of these possibilities are realized, especially towards the end.

In spite of my frequent irritation with the diction of the book (its use, for me, of such an anachronistic patois as "integrated persons," "communal man," "self-realization and communal needs," "potential for social understanding"), my distaste for its frequent banalities ("To perform well artistically means to write well both aesthetically and intellectually, to entertain and yet to strike appropriate targets," p. 209; "Dryden's case against Achitophel, a cumulative one, impresses"—a complete sentence on p. 78; "language and style... and the tone in which they are conveyed become measures of persuasion;" "If satire is to be applicable for all times, then its occasional or historical allusions may have to be annotated for later generations," p. 112), my reservations about some of its judgments ("When... we look back at the narrator of *A Modest* Proposal, we do not see him except as a murky, disturbing presence," p. 88; "Rochester [in *A Satire against Reason and Mankind*] has a powerful theme to convey, but he fails to make it more than superficially moving, for his rhetoric overpowers rather than supports conviction," p. 56—one wonders here if this may not have been a deliberate stratagem on Rochester's part), the book is still to be recommended—mainly to graduate students and generalists rather than to experts in the field. Too much is covered that is already covered elsewhere, too many readings offered that are to be found, in more complex form, elsewhere. A charting of the currents is offered, not a sounding of the depths.

AUBREY L. WILLIAMS

University of Florida

Acts of Inclusion: Studies Bearing on an Elementary Theory of Romanticism by Michael G. Cooke. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979. Pp. xx + 289. $18.50.

Acts of Inclusion is not a book that displays great intellectual energy. It has some good passages, and many felicitously worded sentences, but its total effect is, for some reason, not compelling. I will review some of its merits and weaknesses in an attempt to identify the key deficiency.

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Although I am not at ease with simple periodization,[1] I accept the fact that most scholars find "Romanticism" a useful historical term. Still, I believe that Cooke's use of the word (as in the following passage) goes beyond hypostasis, to the borders of personification. "The silences of" Wordsworth's "The Thorn," he says, "are reminiscent of the besetting silence of romanticism when it comes face to face with consequences, in the ultimate moment of recognition and responsibility" (p. 104). More conventionally naive is the assertion that the romantic period "is a veritable watershed between the medieval and the modern order" (p. 90).

But this is not the main problem with the book, and there is much richness of detail to compensate for the schematic sense of history that it reveals. There are good passages on *Antony and Cleopatra* (p. 87), on "Christabel" (p. 99), on "Ode to Autumn" (p. 117), on *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (p. 167), on *The Prelude* (p. 204), among others. A passage from *Don Juan* "has a severely cryptic quality and is full of images yearning to be heard.... it would seem that the poem gets larger, as by authorial commentary, not only to encompass a polyglot universe in a single space, but also to enunciate the wealth of implication in that universe's single objects" (p. 237). This is good writing. "We might delight in its unplotted ease, indeed we do so, until there comes home to us a sense of its unboundedness. It is hard not to pull back at the intersection of spontaneity and infinity" (p. 227). This is authoritative. "The things we describe as spontaneous, as opposed to laborious, are the things that coincide with our preferences, which after all constitute limitations as much as strengths" (p. 228). The commentary on Byron, an author with whom Cooke is, of course, very much at home, is generally strong and mature.

There are also bad elements and bad passages in the book: facile antitheses—"The principle of power yields to the power of principle" (p. 88); a spasmodic colloquialism—"sucker" used twice as a verb (p. xvii, p. 93); an embarrassingly condescending report of a classroom scene (p. 148); levels of diction so mixed as to produce rhetorical chimeras ("There is in this a quiet stroke of genius that it would be well to highlight," p. 180); generalizations with a strong family resemblance to clichés ("Perhaps the feminine is a power as impalpable, as ubiquitous, as irresistible as the wind" [p. 183]); and the occasional epigraph to a chapter, mercifully but coyly attributed to "Anon." ("Romanticism is the only major movement that has given its basic impulses and aspirations a plenary indulgence, and at the same time a stern critique. Anon." [p. 186]).

It is all the more surprising, then, to encounter a passage of such intellectual and verbal power as the following, occurring, at that, in the context of an argument on synecdoche and fragmentation that lies close to the central concerns of the book: one wonders why someone capable of such strong style should so often slip into dullness. "Shelley reintegrates Orpheus into the romantic scheme by terming language 'a *perpetual* Orphic song,' thus overcoming the piecemeal temporal effect of the root story. No, fragmentation is problematical even at the level of synecdoche.... it admits the existence of the rest, but by a coercive homogeneity denies the range and character substance

[1] The obvious reference here is to Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt, 1970), pp. 144-57 et passim.

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of what goes beyond it. At bottom, Blake's 'The Tyger' works as a poem about the poignant insanity of a man who truly sees nothing but parts, whose vision is a fearfully unqualified and unrelieved synecdoche, affecting alike the Creator and the Tyger" (pp. 222-23).

Fragmentation is what this book desires to avoid: through a stragetic generosity that seeks to extend each idea into a principle, or spread the resonances of each fact until they broaden into a concept, it attempts over and over again to make generality out of the particular, or at least to cast every observation into the most general form in which it can be expressed. These tendencies in his own writing Cooke attributes to the romantics, calling them "acts of inclusion." "The quest for fullness of recognition may be associated with the form of the epic, and we may turn now to Byron's use of that form as another act of inclusion" (p. 219). But the acts of inclusion are notably Cooke's own: too often, they consist in the blurring of boundaries between the specific and the general to produce pseudo-concepts. In De Quincey, "analysis of everyday becomes apocalypse, and awareness of singularity becomes a promise of catholicity" (p. 257). On the same page, "very few people have charged Charles Lamb with an apocalyptic subjectivity, but even he shows germane interests in his prose. His essay on 'The Sanity of True Genius' makes him a spokesman for such subjectivity, as he turns what society might see as eccentric lines of personality into the most fundamental pattern of human potentiality. In this light, we might also see in the 'Dissertation on Roast Pig' a light-hearted instance of the romantic taste for new developments or new revelation."

Another typical sentence, at the end of a long section on romantic criminality: "The romantic period, whatever sort of social action it purveys, is orientated toward consequences rather than punishment" (p. 103). Cooke seems to think that you accomplish something simply by moving the lens back to focus on a larger area so that you no longer have to account for the things that fall in the smaller area; that a wide word ("consequences") will automatically explain what a narrow one ("punishment") did not. But the new categories would have to be more compelling rather than merely more inclusive to make them interesting, to give us a different grip on the subject. What vitiates a book that contains much good writing is, I have said, a tendency to read a feature of the author's own style, an "inclusiveness" that is too often only approximation, into its subject-matter: but an approach to thinking that itself lacks form cannot provide a satisfactory model for organization in the material to which it is applied.

IRVING MASSEY

State University of New York at Buffalo

Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley by Nathaniel Brown. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. 298. $17.50.

The first half of this book provides a competent, well-written summary of Shelley's concept of "civilized sex"; the second half insists that this concept is feminist. It is not. Hence the title of the book is a misnomer and Nathaniel Brown's argument is specious.

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Brown begins with a careful description of Shelley's *Discourse on Love*, rightly emphasizing its centrality to Shelley's theories of love, sexuality and the status of women. He details Shelley's hostility to homosexuality, libertinism, and prostitution and his celebration of a liberated sexuality for both men and women that involves the intellectual and emotional as well as the physical self. Brown correctly insists that Shelley frequently uses explicitly sexual imagery in his poetry to mark the moments of climactic union between loving minds and bodies. That Shelley's obsessive imagery of rising, trembling, panting, sinking, falling, expiring is sexual will surprise no one familiar with the criticism of Shelley's poetry published in the last two decades. However, Brown does extend this material in one interesting way. He argues that Shelley saw Greek love culminating not in the homosexuality he abhorred but rather in an intensely emotional "spontaneous orgasm." He further suggests that such orgasms occur at the climaxes (pun intended) of "Indian Serenade," "Epipsychidion," and "Ode to the West Wind." While no one would doubt that the imagery of these poems derives from sexual experiences, and particularly from wet dreams, it seems odd that Brown never suggests or explores their most likely source: the adolescent male fantasies accompanying masturbation. That masturbation lies behind such episodes is supported by the accounts that Brown himself included concerning the wide-spread sexual activity at Eton when Shelley was there, including "onanism, mutual masturbation and ... orgies of naked boys in bed together" (142). Nonetheless, it is possible that the intense, sensitive and eroticised adolescent Shelley experienced spontaneous orgasm on occasion and made this experience an emblem of the most purified sexuality that he later associated with Greek love and Platonic eros.

Brown's claim that Shelley was a feminist rests on his advocacy of androgyny. Shelley believed that women should be given the same liberal education and sexual freedom as men. A woman should become, in the terms Shelley develops in *On Love*, the "antitype," the perfect correspondent to the ideal "prototype" that a man projects of his future perfected self. Brown argues ardently that such sympathetic identification between the sexes leads to a condition of androgyny, the highest feminist ideal of total equality between the sexes. But we need to look more critically at exactly what androgyny means for Shelley. As his own term "antitype" implies, androgyny is for Shelley a projection of the male self into a female form. The male prototype appropriates female characteristics to become the antitype. Such an appropriation is pure narcissism, a process of male ego-gratification that has little to do with a genuine respect for women as independent human beings.

That Shelley's androgynous ideal is essentially male is seen most clearly in *The Revolt of Islam*, a work that Brown incredibly calls "the most powerful feminist poem in the language and ... the most thoroughly grounded in the realities of the woman question" (181). Brown bases this assertion on the fact that in this poem the female protagonist Cynthna leads a political revolt that succeeds briefly in overwhelming the tyrant and initiating a time of universal peace and love. But Brown ignores the fact that the ideal Cynthna serves is embodied in the poem as exclusively male. Laon is the Serpent/Morning Star, a radiant form beside which, at the end of the first Canto, Cynthna remains but a cloaked "sha-

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dow." And Cynthna consistently portrays herself as totally dependent on Laon: she is his pupil, she sings *his* songs (l. 1040), she feels she must prove her "worth" to him (l. 506), her powers derive entirely from his ideas and rhetoric. As the "female mind" (l. 973), she cannot create her own utopian visions; instead, her role is to inspire his revolutionary zeal and to be absolutely loyal to his ideals (significantly, her visions are born from sleep, from her "unconscious" mind, while his are consciously and deliberately created). Shelley's "feminism" extends only to the rhetorical question: "Can man be free if woman be a slave?" (l. 1045). He envisions a world where women are educated and sexually liberated, but only for the purpose of becoming more satisfying intellectual, emotional and sexual companions for men; he does not grant them autonomy or the capacity to lead without male guidance. In dedicating this poem to Mary Godwin Shelley as his "companion," Shelley directly invoked her mother's argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that rational women would make better companions for men. For Mary Wollstonecraft, such rhetoric was necessary to win the sympathetic attention of a male audience. In the mouth of a man, the affirmation of a woman's social role as "companion" to a man has patriarchal overtones.

It is critical to see that Cynthna can lead a revolution only—and literally—in the name of Laon; she is known to her followers as "Laone." And when Laon sacrifices himself that she may flee to America and start a new era of love and peace, Cynthna instead races to join Laon on his funeral pyre, choosing to die with him. Thus *The Revolt of Islam* is a male fantasy of feminism: the completely sympathetic woman is so entirely identified with the male ego that she cannot survive apart from him. That this version of androgyny is but a subtler form of male sexism has been cogently argued in "The Politics of Androgyny" by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and the responses to this essay published in the 1974 volume of *Women's Studies*, an influential document in the development of contemporary feminist thought which Brown does not mention.

Moreover, to call *The Revolt of Islam* a feminist utopia, as Brown does, is to misread completely that genre as it has developed from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978). Authentic feminist utopias depict a world where women are free of male domination and exploitation, either because men do not live there (as in *Herland* and *The Wanderground*) or because the society is genuinely gender-free. In the utopian community of Mattapoisett depicted in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, children are born from breeders and males and females share equally in breast-feeding, parenting, work, military defense, and homosexual and heterosexual love. In contrast, Shelley's utopias present women only as soul-mates; and his affirmation of free-love, while extended to women (he encouraged Mary to have sex with Thomas Hogg), is primarily a male adolescent fantasy. Mary Wollstonecraft, for all that *A Vindication* directly inspired Shelley's concept of the woman as an educated companion, did not there advocate free love; her rationally and affectionately united men and women were monogamous.

A feminist analysis of Shelley's thought and life would have to consider several issues that Brown ignores. First, what were Shelley's concepts of child-

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rearing, parenting, and the family? Shelley was vehemently opposed to birth-control and fathered at least six children before he was thirty. Beyond asserting that Shelley affirmed the "joys of parenthood" (197), Brown offers no evidence that Shelley took the responsibilities of a parent seriously. Indeed, as we know from Mary Shelley, the day after their daughter Clara died, Shelley left his grieving wife at the Hoppner's and went to discuss poetry with Byron. Secondly, how did Shelley treat the women with whom he was emotionally involved? Shelley's relationships with his first wife Harriet Westbrook (whom he abandoned when she failed to live up to his ideal antitype), with Elizabeth Hitchener (whose reputation he destroyed, whose financial ruin he caused, and whom he repeatedly insulted after they parted), and with Mary Shelley (whose "frigidity" and emotional distance from him were caused primarily by his callous disregard for her feelings toward their two dying children and his numerous mistresses)—none of these relationships shows a genuine respect for women that could be called feminist in any meaningful sense of the term. Nor does Brown explore what is perhaps the most fascinating area of Shelley's relationships with women: his powerful Oedipal ties with his beautiful mother and his intensely close adolescent bonding with his look-alike sister Elizabeth. The latter relationship in particular is a more likely psychological origin for Shelley's explicit brother-sister incest fantasies in *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound* than the ideal of sympathetic identification that Brown emphasizes. Despite Brown's arguments, this book does not seriously challenge the traditional view of Shelley as an adolescent narcissist who wished to surround himself with a harem of adoring female versions of himself: intellectually and sexually liberated women, true, but women whose ultimate function was to provide constant and sympathetic stimulation for *his* faculties.

Had Nathaniel Brown entitled his book *Shelley's Attitudes to Love, Sexuality and Women*, he would have given us a useful compendium of Shelley's thought on these subjects. By trying to cast Shelley as "an ideal type of humanity, beaconing the way to the future" of androgynous unisexuality (226) and as a "welcome inspiration" to the feminist movement (180), Brown does both Shelley and the feminists a disservice. Shelley's androgyny does not transcend "patriarchal definitions of gender," as Brown claims; it only subsumes the woman more completely under the psyche of the man.

Anne K. Mellor

Stanford University

Victorian Fantasy by Stephen Prickett. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979, Pp. xvi + 257. $17.50.

Victorian Fantasy "attempts to describe a variety of writers [who] tried to extend and enrich ways of perceiving 'reality' by a variety of non-realistic techniques that included nonsense, dreams, visions, and the creation of other worlds...not in opposition to the prevailing realism, but in *addition* to it" (xiii, xv). Prickett's main task, then, is one of practical criticism within an historically

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defined field while his clear subsidiary task is the theoretical one of justifying his perceptions of historical boundaries and of "the prevailing realism." Although his success as practical critic is greater than his success as theoretician, the volume as a whole nonetheless offers much of value.

"The Evolution of a Word," Prickett's opening chapter, does not so much define fantasy as offer some glimpses into the way the term was used from the Romantics to the Moderns, particularly in opposition to "imagination." (Prickett is well known for his work on Coleridge and Wordsworth.) "'Imagination' and 'fantasy' had come to stand for two sides of the Victorian psyche: its sacred and profane loves... light and dark" (6, 9). Rather than proceed theoretically, Prickett suggests that "it is in fact much more rewarding to see this polarity of fantasy and imagination straightforwardly in terms of literary genre" (43) and he strives to organize the rest of his book accordingly. "Christmas at Scrooge's" primarily contrasts Thomas Hood's *Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Leg* with Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the first (which is only arguably a fantasy) being presented as social satire while the second is presented as psychological exploration. "Dreams and Nightmares" concerns presumably unrepressed fantasies, both the non-sexual and the sexual. Although Beardsley's *Under the Hill* is obviously sexual, Prickett is clearly mistaken in asserting that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is "[without] brooding metaphysical evil and sexual corruption" (97) ("'I will be with you on your wedding night,'" the monster swears); perhaps it is Prickett's failure to see Mary Shelley's repressed sexuality that induced him to place *Frankenstein* in this chapter. The following chapter, "Consensus and Nonsense," contrasts the "emotion, nostalgia and sheer buffoonery [of Lear's nonsense with the] undeviating rationality [Carroll] pushed to its furthest and wildest extremes" (131). While this oversimplifies (Prickett himself brilliantly shows Lear's etymological accuracy while Carroll's hidden obsession with death and sexuality is well known), the dichotomy is instructive. "Adults in Allegory Land" contrasts the "minute detail" of Kingsley's world with the grand Platonic ideals of the worlds created by George MacDonald, Prickett's defensible pick as all-time champion fantasist. Finally "Worlds within Worlds" discusses the fantasies of Kipling and Nesbit, the former capitalizing on his childhood imaginings, the latter bringing out her adult insights, and both writing ostensibly for children because "the mystery and urgency of other worlds [had been] dissipated... by the conventions of Victorian naturalism" (235). Although somewhat organized to foster theoretical inquiry, this is clearly a volume of historical scholarship.

One of the great virtues of *Victorian Fantasy* as literary history is that it does not confine itself to literature. There is some of the usual discussion of architecture at Walpole's and Beckford's places and some unusual discussion of the way the mid-century discovery of dinosaurs transformed the prevailing images of monstrosity. The authors who are treated at length almost all generate suggestive parallel treatments of the works of their illustrators. But there are weaknesses of historical scholarship from time to time. Although Prickett recognizes that "so many of the nineteenth-century fantasies... draw heavily and in some detail on *The Arabian Nights*" (217), he ignores that collection and the whole vogue of Oriental tale (like Addison's 1711 "Our Ideas of

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Time") and instead asserts that "*Suddenly* [emphasis mine] fairy stories had become respectable" (5). Although Gershon Legman's magisterial *The Limerick* reports that verse form as early as the fourteenth century (Legman, p. xiv), Prickett puts the "earliest examples" in 1820 (122). The book, in short, needs to be read with care.

There is much in *Victorian Fantasy* to repay careful reading. Like Roger Sale's *Fairy Tales and After*, Prickett's volume offers serious and often insightful criticism of works usually ignored and almost always, when mentioned, slighted. If one looks for theoretical definitions or historical exhaustiveness, this book disappoints by its omission of significant treatment of matters that ought to fall under its title concept, the prose of William Morris for example, Medievalism, Scott's novels, the vogue for vampirism, *Peter Pan*, and the science fiction of Doyle and Wells. But there is much here that is unexpected. As part of his detailed discussion of *A Christmas Carol*, Prickett observes that "money as power is a central theme of Victorian fiction" (57) and that "the will to dominate rather than money *per se* is thus the key to Scrooge's character" (58). Contrary to the popular impression that Scrooge undergoes a fundamental conversion, Prickett is shockingly right in observing that

> Scrooge's character is not transformed. He retains all his old desire to shock, startle, and dominate: the purchase of the turkey on Christmas morning ('the one as big as the man'), the surprise visit to his nephew, and the raising of Bob Crachit's wages all have the authentic drama of the old Scrooge. What has been transformed is his feeling of identity with mankind: his realization that what he has lost and needs most is love. (60-61)

Time and again Prickett turns out an insight not in opposition to the usual wisdom but in *addition* to it. In giving serious readings to Lear's limericks and dwelling on the meanings of monsters, in distinguishing boldly the exuberant fantasies from the self-destroying ones, in reviewing major authors and viewing minor ones, Prickett does a service. He overstates, for example, when he claims that "Nonsense constituted an entire alternative aesthetic, making possible a radically different kind of art" (146), but he is right to force our attention on the sense of Nonsense and right to argue that without understanding Fantasy we cannot understand the Victorians.

ERIC S. RABKIN

University of Michigan

Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre by Sharon Cameron. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. x + 280. $15.00.

The poetry of Emily Dickinson has been subjected to critical scrutiny from many different angles. First seen as a literary curiosity admired for its quaintness and its differences from that of her contemporaries, her poetry has been taken up by a variety of apologists and interpreters, from those who tried to make her a precursor of the Imagists, to the New Critics, who delighted in her ambiguities

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and paradoxes, to the Freudians, who found hidden longings and hatreds, to the Existentialists, who found *angst*, to the biographical critics, who found a record of her family relationships. The cumulative effect of over a half century of criticism has been generally good, however, as we have come to recognize Dickinson for the major poet she is. Recent criticism has been less at pains to explain or apologize for her poetry and more concerned with penetrating its structures. Among those recent critics who have skillfully dealt with the work as a whole while at the same time giving close readings of individual poems are David Porter and Robert Weisbuch. Weisbuch, for example, in *Emily Dickinson's Poetry* (1975) has examined Dickinson's use of typology to suggest the various and multiple patterns of meaning in the poems.

Sharon Cameron has built upon (and gracefully acknowledged) this previous criticism, adding to it the insights yielded by a deft and brilliant application of phenomenological criticism, particularly the writings of Derrida, Lacan, and Wittgenstein, to suggest that Dickinson is a phenomenalist poet, "who argues the connection between presence, its loss, and the restorative powers of language." Actually, Cameron is interested not only in Dickinson, with whose work she is thoroughly familiar; she is a theoretician as well as a practical critic, and *Lyric Time* asks to be read simultaneously as three different books: (1) as a study of Dickinson's poems themselves, using close readings and generalizing about the poet's various techniques and strategies; (2) as an application of phenomenalist critical theory to Dickinson's work, and an attempt to develop and refine that body of theory; and (3) as an attempt to develop a theory of the lyric poem, using examples from the English seventeenth century, the Romantic period, and modern poetry, as well as the poetry of Dickinson. She manages to carry off this balancing act and end up with a challenging book about temporality in Dickinson's work that leads outward to an exploration of similar questions concerning the lyric genre. Chapter Five, in fact, is concerned mainly with these questions, and is actually a prolegomenon to a future study.

One of Cameron's strengths is her ability to read a controversial and difficult poem closely and to weave that reading into her larger argument. One of the best examples of this is her reading of "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun." She regards two of the generally accepted readings as inadequate: one interprets the speaker as God's marksman who guards Him at night; the other makes the "Master" the speaker's lover, whom she guards with jealous fury, seemingly preferring violence to sexuality. But because the last stanza is so puzzling and contradictory Cameron argues that the poem cannot make sense either as religious allegory or as the depiction of an erotic relationship. What she detects in the poem is a dialectic of rage, suggested by the last stanza, which expresses a conflict between "identity," conceived of as violence, and a conception of life as rage. This enigmatic stanza scrutinizes the speaker's own fury, and views the speaker-gun as the agent of death rather than the object of it. The discussion of this poem lies at the center of the second chapter, subtitled "The Dialectic of Rage," which examines a group of Dickinson poems that seek a way out of time and the conflicts within time: essentially sexuality and death. Into these poems a disruptive voice enters, attempting to prevent the convergence of these two forces by manifesting itself in the form of rage.

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In this type of poem rage becomes presence, a means of escape from temporality. Escape from temporality is the governing idea of the book, and, of course, of Dickinson's poetry as well. Her desire to depart from the temporal order into "Immortality" has been frequently noticed, and Cameron sees this dialectic between time and immortality working in a number of different ways, including the poets of grief and loss. She goes further and provides speculations on this tendency in more conventional lyric poets, from Marvell in the seventeenth century through Blake, Keats, Yeats, and others. The loss of a world outside of time is a loss that Dickinson in an intense and striking way attempts to recover, and Cameron sees this as an abiding impulse in the lyric genre.

Her subtly developed arguments are shaped and informed throughout by a critical sensibility attuned to Derrida and Wallace Stevens; many of her happier turns of phrase contain Stevensian echoes or cadences. The book is not for the casual reader; it builds carefully on the explorations of Dickinson's inner structures done recently by Weisbuch and Porter, but it takes some interesting—and justifiable—risks in speculating and offering hypotheses about the nature and function of the lyric seen as a struggle with time.

DONALD BARLOW STAUFFER

State University of New York at Albany

The Achievement of Margaret Fuller by Margaret Vanderhaar Allen. University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979. Pp. 225. $13.50.

The Transcendentalist belief in "life as art," a dangerous concept derived from Goethe's "self-culture," often dispersed the energies of fine minds like Bronson Alcott, Jones Very and (I would add, Allen would not) Margaret Fuller. Cultivating a complex personality's many facets works against achieving excellence in any one field, unless one possesses the genius of a Goethe. Allen believes Fuller did achieve multiple excellence as a social reformer, political thinker, essayist, creative writer, feminist, critic and conversationalist. While these last two claims have some validity, the others are excessive. To say Fuller "ranks with the best writers of her age as an epigrammatist" is, considering "her age" included Dickinson, Emerson and Thoreau, to succumb to the enthusiasm of an advocate.

But, despite occasional hyperbole, Allen has produced one of the most solid interpretations of Fuller's thought. Allen has read all the pertinent material, condensed it admirably, and presented the most relevant in a highly readable style. The focus on Fuller's relationship to Emerson and Goethe is sharp, and the discussion of Fuller's aesthetic use of the garden motif, of her contribution as a critic, and of her views on nature and civilization is scholarly and succinct. In addition to being a dependable overview of Fuller's achievement, Allen's *Achievement* also offers original insights, the chief being her startling and persuasive argument that Fuller was a precursor of Walt Whitman as well as of Susan B. Anthony. Most of all, Allen has reached her main goal, the principal

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aim of the half-dozen Fuller studies published this past decade—to dispel the distorting mists that swirled up around Fuller after her death in 1850, a fog of misinterpretation that her *Memoirs*, edited by Channing, Emerson and Clarke, contributed much to create.

This is necessary work. Both the plaster cast and the Gothic image must be smashed before an accurate reconstruction of the truths of Fuller's life and mind can take place. The methodology by which these truths are to be revealed will have to be that of sophisticated feminism because, for all her limitations, Fuller will continue to be an intriguing personality not only for what she accomplished but because of the age in which she flourished, an era when college doors were closed to women and when Blackstone classed women with minors and idiots before the law. Allen and other recent critics have now corrected the vision of the past; they have prepared the way for the next phase of Fuller criticism which will answer even more fundamental questions and make specific contributions to the history and theory of woman's education, the definition of feminine psychology, and the clearer understanding of cultural paradigms.

One example should suffice. Everyone mentions how Fuller's father, Timothy, a strict disciplinarian, forced a course of study upon Fuller to make her a paragon of intellectual erudition, a regimen that Fuller blamed for her frequent headaches, fainting spells and sleepwalking. Some fault Timothy for his harshness, but Allen points out that Fuller would not have become Fuller without this education.

Recent criticism has determined the facts of this anecdote; the next wave of Fuller criticism will be able to interpret such questions as: if feminists like Allen are correct in stating that women think differently from men, then what sort of education should Fuller have had, and how should it have been conducted? Had she followed the same course of study, but under her mother's tutelage as Fuller's heroine Madame De Staël had, would that have spared her physical and psychological torment? Would reading Virgil late at night with her mother instead of with her father have prevented those sexual nightmares about wild horses trampling her? To what extent is her later obsession with cold male figures like Emerson, Goethe, and John Nathan explained by her close but cold relationship with her father? Is her marriage to the sweet-tempered, self-effacing Ossoli a reverse mirror image of her parents' marriage? Indeed, since Fuller's frequent illnesses parallel her mother's behavior, was Fuller following a role model of womanhood or perhaps manifesting a secret sympathy with her mother (*Sarah* Margaret Fuller did drop her first name, thus sharing the same name with her mother)? Lastly, how abnormal were Fuller's illnesses set against the norm of her times, a standard of female illness that has been recorded in literature from Austen to Wharton and developed thematically in Grand Opera? These are topics which the next phase of Fuller criticism will investigate, and that exciting next phase of feminist criticism has been made possible through the efforts of critics like Allen.

HENRY GOLEMBA

Wayne State University

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The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound by Michael Alexander. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979. Pp. 247. $14.95.

Until this book appeared, there was no adequate, up-to-date critical introduction to the poetic oeuvre of Ezra Pound. The works of Hugh Kenner (1951), G. S. Fraser (1960), and M. L. Rosenthal (1960) served well in their day, but could say little or nothing about the post-Pisan *Cantos*. Among the more recent introductory essays, the pamphlets of William Van O'Connor (1963), Marion Montgomery (1970), and Jeannette Lander (1971) are nugatory; the books of Christine Brooke-Rose (1971), Sister Bernetta Quinn (1972), and Donald Davie (1975) are, respectively, too precious, too inaccurate, and too advanced to be useful to beginning students; and Peter Brooker's *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (1979), though an accurate and intelligent reference companion, does not provide the broad discussion of issues and attitudes without which many readers find it difficult to orient themselves to Pound's poetry. Michael Alexander aims, in *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound*, "to present, in a manageable volume, an introductory critical survey of Pound's verse as a whole, including the translations" (p. 13). Alexander has fulfilled this aim superbly. His book is now the best available general introduction to the poet and his fascinating but sometimes inaccessible work. Alexander's ABC may be confidently recommended to any reader who seeks initiation into the Ezratic mysteries.

The 247-page format gives Alexander more elbow-room than was enjoyed by the authors of most of the books named above. Alexander is able to digress, recapitulate, crack a joke, or spend thirteen pages on an early poem if the discussion requires it. Instead of one pinched chapter on *The Cantos*, he has the disposition of five, or more than a hundred pages. As a result, Alexander's introduction seems less hurried and more judicious than most. The reader does not feel bustled along by a guide who is glancing at his watch and worrying about lunch.

Alexander addresses himself primarily to "an uninitiated British reader," one to whom Pound may seem not only difficult but unutterably foreign (p. 14). To orient such a reader, Alexander compares Pound frequently to the classic authors at the heart of the British school and university curriculum: Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson, Herrick, Marvell, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth, Keats, Swinburne, Hopkins, Yeats. American readers, unaccustomed to thinking of Pound in such a context, will find these comparisons novel and challenging. Yet nothing in Alexander's exposition will strike a literate but uninitiated American student as inaccessible or incomprehensible. Alexander has an excellent grasp of American history and culture, and a fine ear for American speech. His perspective and his style are, in the best sense, transatlantic, to resurrect a term that Pound's generation found useful.

Alexander has lived long and intimately with his subject. His knowledge of Pound's work is familiar yet clear-eyed, affectionate yet accurate. By no means an uncritical idolater of the Master, Alexander concedes some of the most damaging charges made against Pound's work by unsympathetic critics. But Alexander has an unshakeable conviction of Pound's poetic merits, which

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he elucidates with eloquence, warmth, and wit. In other words, he maintains critical balance without losing enthusiasm, no mean feat in the tipsy world of Pound studies.

The unity of Pound's work, for Alexander, is post-romantic in nature, a unity of the poet's temperament and responsiveness to emotional experience. Alexander ascribes Pound's disjunctive techniques, for example, not to the self-conscious intellectual program of modernist aesthetics, but to something more fundamental in Pound's very make-up: "Pound's obliquity, though it has to do with his dislike for obvious conceptualization, is the semi-dramatic strategy natural to a sensibility inwardly in awe of life, and the product of a temperament possessed of deep instincts, though normally reticent in their expression. The mysteriousness and refinement in Pound is not an affectation, in spite of his striking of attitudes; it is rather that his inner life was not for direct export" (p. 43). This is a more generous (and British) diagnosis of Pound's odd habits of mind than is Herbert Schneidau's suggestion, in *Paideuma* for Spring 1976, that the poet wrote out of something very close to an aphasic mental disorder.

Alexander speaks with special sympathy and insight about Pound's translations. On this subject, the critic has particular authority, since he himself has translated much Old English poetry, including the Penguin *Beowulf*. Pound's *Seafarer* has obviously been an inspiration to Alexander, who devotes thirteen excellent pages to it, concluding that it is "the most powerful realization of Old English poetry we are ever likely to have" (p. 78). Elsewhere in his book Alexander writes perceptively about *Cathay*, *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, *The Confucian Odes*, and *The Women of Trachis*.

Alexander chooses not to discuss Pound's prose writings, lest such discussion blur his focus on the poetry. This decision is justifiable, but leads to the book's only major omission: that of a concise summary and evaluation of Pound's economic and political beliefs. That Alexander is capable of such a summary seems clear; his passing references to economic and political subjects in *The Cantos* are informed and accurate, and he provides elsewhere in the book an excellent synopsis of Pound's religious philosophy. But he does not offer a comparable account of Pound's social philosophy, some explanation of which is badly needed by most uninitiated readers.

Nevertheless, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* is itself no small critical achievement. Because it will be of great use to future students of the poet's work, this book ought to be put into a paperback edition as soon as possible.

HUGH WITEMEYER

The University of New Mexico

The Moment of "Scrutiny" by Francis Mullhern. London: New Left Books, 1979. Pp. 331. $24.00.

F. R. Leavis' most influential critical work originally appeared in *Scrutiny*, the quarterly he edited. This journal was also, as Francis Mulhern writes in his new book, the organizer and bearer of an important "ideological formation."

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Leavis' was only one voice among many, although the most brilliant. Mulhern's book brings us the whole chorus: D. W. Harding, Wilfrid Mellers, L. C. Knights, G. H. Bantock, and others.

Mulhern's concern is not chiefly with Leavis but rather with Leavisism as a force within twentieth century English culture. Its influence persists but Mulhern limits his account to the lifespan of *Scrutiny* (1932-53). He has performed a kind of political-cultural autopsy not so much to honor *Scrutiny* as to make clear its "material specificity." The purpose of such a critique can only be to liberate present-day literary and social thought.

The author's solicitude for the present informs his historical critique at every turn. He is a Marxist and an editor of the London-based quarterly, *New Left Review*. Like others associated with that journal, notably Perry Anderson and Terry Eagleton, Mulhern sees Leavisism, despite its anti-Marxism, as more important for present-day Marxists than the simplicities of explicitly Marxist criticism of the English 1930s.

The Moment of "Scrutiny" has three major sections, sandwiched by an introduction on the Cambridge intellectual milieu in which the journal was conceived and a restrospect at the end. The first of these sections, and to my mind the best, takes up *Scrutiny* in the bold, brave days if its youth, up to 1939. The second part considers the journal's program for educational reform during the war years. Mulhern writes well, in this section, about the political-cultural meaning of Leavis' turning in the 1940s from poetry to criticism of the novel. The third section deals with the post-war period (1945-53), during which *Scrutiny*'s very success was the condition of its dissolution.

The first part defines the sense of cultural crisis which *Scrutiny*'s contributors shared. In reaction, Mulhern writes, "the journal elaborated a binary discourse that united a technicist conception of 'civilization' (the domain of quantities and means) with a complementarily idealist conception of 'culture' (the domain of qualities, values and ends). The 'community' so affirmed was a spiritual entity, incarnated not in social structures but in 'tradition.'" In this formulation *Scrutiny*'s key words—"culture," "community," "tradition"—are brought together and illuminated by the conjunction.

From this analysis follows Mulhern's conclusion, which is his book's main point: "the principal effect of this discourse, manifest equally in its utterances and its practical policy, was a categorial dissolution of politics." The purpose of *The Moment of "Scrutiny"* is to lift that repression, to make politics once more possible.

Mulhern places *Scrutiny* in the context of twentieth century European social thought, most notably in relation to classical sociology and to the romantic interest in national culture (*Volksgeist*). Previously, especially in the writing of Raymond Williams, Leavisism has been presented exclusively in English terms, as a twentieth century continuation of the "organicist" critical tradition of Burke, Coleridge, Arnold, and T. S. Eliot. I don't think Mulhern is persuasive in locating Leavisism on the map of European modernism, but he does reveal in his attempt the openness of the new Marxist criticism in English to Continental influence.

This influence is evident in Mulhern's attempt, as he says, to "elucidate the workings of (*Scrutiny*'s) discourse." As in recent French theories of the text,

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Mulhern sees ideological struggle in terms of a clash of discourses, or discursive practices. The discourse as such is more important than the individual critic-hero Leavis who gives it expression.

The most important difference between the Marxism of Raymond Williams and Arnold Kettle and that of the young English Althusserians has been the latter's philosophical and theoretical rigor. This presents a problem in the ideological critique of Leavisism, which was so militantly anti-theoretical. The problem was canvassed in a famous exchange in 1937 between René Wellek and Leavis on the relation between literary criticism and philosophy. Wellek wrote at that time: "I could wish that you had stated your assumptions more explicitly and defended them systematically." In reply Leavis reaffirmed his idea of criticism as involving acts of "realization" which have nothing to do with explicit norms or theoretical systems. The argument was dropped, and Mulhern now resumes it.

In what seems to me the most original part of his study Mulhern argues that Leavis' anti-theoreticism is itself in the service of a theory, of an ideology which conceals its premises for strategic reasons. *Scrutiny*'s god-terms, words like "concreteness" and "particularity," were not "the *names* of self-evident data of perception" but rather were "*terms* in a discourse... whose logical substructures were in principle no less 'systematic' or 'abstract' than those of Marxism or (I. A. Richards') hermeneutics."

What then were the assumptions of *Scrutiny*'s discursive practice? One was that "the critic could and should achieve unmediated community with his text, and with his presumed audience, the 'readers of poetry as such.'" The question of the critic's relation to his audience leads back to social-political issues. That of the critic's "unmediated community with his text" is more directly literary.

Mulhern observes that Leavisian criticism does not depend upon definition, as does, say, that of Yvor Winters. Instead, Leavis' typical gesture was "recognition—recognition, and where appropriate, affirmation of what is immanent in the concrete literary word." Criticism, on this view, does not *produce* meaning. Rather, "to criticize was to bear witness to meanings that were already adequately constituted in the words on the page, needing only to be 'realized' in the consciousness of the reader."

It follows that for Leavis criticism was "a form of intuitionism: specifically, it consisted in *the intuition of moral values in literary experience*." This intuitionism in turn implies other assumptions, as for example about the homogeneity of the audience, which is necessarily a select few, a veritable Coleridgean clerisy. *Scrutiny*'s elitism leads out again to politics. The argument is knotty and sometimes elliptical, and I wish Mulhern had allowed himself more space to spell it out in the crucial chapter entitled "Standards, Currencies and Values." I wish, too, that Mulhern had been more clear about the connection between Leavis' horror of cultural disorder and his idealist metaphysics. These objections, however, are minor. This is a book to be grateful for and to make one regret the lack of a comparable study of the two American literary-critical groups which were contemporaneous with *Scrutiny*: the New Critics and the New York intellectuals.

MARK L. KRUPNICK

The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

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Theodore Roethke: An American Romantic by Jay Parini. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979. Pp. xi + 208. $12.50.

Theodore Roethke schooled his spirit in the marsh and mire, in "the Void, immediate and terrifying." He is our great poet of the regressive imagination moving back through "the kingdom of bang and blab" into the "kingdom of stinks and sighs." Roethke's goal was to recover the first primordial world of the psyche, to think his body into the vegetal country of greenhouse and far field, to root himself "in a deep deep yes. In all." Ultimately he went back because he wanted to go forward, remaking himself in the process. Thus he descends into the underworld in a poem like "Root Cellar" ("What a congress of stinks!") in order to reach the tenuous sunlight realm of "Child on Top of a Greenhouse" ("And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!"). Roethke's subject is rebirth and metamorphosis, the snake shedding its skin, the man struggling to regain, in Yeats's phrase, "radical innocence." He could say playfully that "I've crawled from the mire, alert as a saint or a dog." And it is because he was always coming back into the light that Roethke considered himself one of the poets of affirmation. As he said, "None the less, in spite of all the muck and welter, the dark, the *dreck* of these poems, I count myself among the happy poets." Roethke is a poet of Blakean exuberance and his *Collected Poems* document the achieved transformation of obsession into joy.

Jay Parini's book on Roethke as an American Romantic adds to our understanding of Roethke's poetry and thus represents a solid addition to the critical literature. Parini's study offers what he calls "a map of Theodore Roethke's secret planet." He tracks Roethke's poetic development from *Open House* (1941) to *The Far Field* (1964), detailing individual lyrics and sequences in order to isolate major patterns and thus discover the poet's "mythos." Parini's essential contribution is his reading of Roethke's work as an extension of the literature of American Romanticism. He considers Roethke not merely in terms of his debt to Yeats (and it seems to me that both Roethke and his commentators have overacknowledged his borrowings from "the last Romantic"), but also as a late descendant of Emerson and Whitman. For Roethke is finally a poet of the egotistical sublime, celebrating and moralizing the American landscape, reading nature as "a steady storm of correspondences," a symbol of the spirit. Roethke called Reason "that dreary shed, that hutch for grubby schoolboys," and Parini interprets his plunge into the unconscious as an internalized quest romance. This enables him to consider Roethke's necessary pilgrimage in traditional Romantic terms.

Parini is at his best in defining the constellation of images, ideas, and influences animating Roethke's major sequences. (His book is weakest when it tries to fit some of the poems into mechanistic, so called "mythic" terms derived from Joseph Campbell. Must our critics continue to rely on grand, supposedly universal, obsolete anthropological models?) Parini's irrefutable argument is that the fact and symbol of his family's greenhouse stands at the center of Roethke's mature work. The greenhouse was for him at one and the same time a natural and an artificial world, a place of order and chaos, generation and decay. He called it "a reality harsher than reality," both

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"heaven and hell, a kind of tropics created in the savage climate of Michigan...." The great moment in Roethke's poetic life is the transition between his first and second books, the way in which he worked out of the strict aesthetic straitjacket of *Open House* into the organic flowering of *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (1948). The greenhouse is at the heart of the breakthrough. It first of all gave Roethke an ostensible subject and rooted his work in what he called "an anguish of concreteness." He would go on to become, in John Berryman's lovely phrase, "the Garden Master," and indeed no poet has more acutely surveyed the natural growth and degeneration of roots, weeds, moss, carnations, and orchids. The greenhouse is also linked to two other discoveries Roethke was making at the same time. Through the promptings of Kenneth Burke he began to explore the poetic possibilities of the unconscious, returning to the world of his childhood and thus commencing "the retrogressive course" of his "hallucinatory dream." At the same time he realized that the organic process of plants could stand as a metaphor and model for the poetic enterprise itself, each poem taking on its own intrinsic shape. Thus in formal and expressive terms Roethke became a Romantic poet.

Theodore Roethke: An American Romantic does not extend or redefine current notions of Romanticism, but it does place Roethke firmly in a Romantic tradition. As such it is a sturdy contribution to the study of Roethke's poetry. The Garden Master is himself gone, but this book helps to demonstrate why his work stands not on the peripheries but at the center of our literature.

EDWARD HIRSCH

Wayne State University

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CRITICISM

a quarterly for literature and the arts

volume XXII, number 3 · summer 1980

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WILLIAM GALPERIN*

"Imperfect While Unshared": The Role of the Implied Reader in Wordsworth's "Excursion"

> "Ah! how different is it to render account to ourselves of ourselves and to render account to the public of ourselves." [1]
> Emerson on *The Excursion*

In the middle of *The Excursion*, a poem which up until then has been remarkable only in its utter cheerlessness, the Poet-narrator offers what may seem to be well-deserved "thanks/For [his] own peaceful lot and happy choice":

> A choice that from the passions of the world
> Withdrew, and fixed me in a still retreat;
> Sheltered, but not to social duties lost,
> Secluded, but not buried; and with song
> Cheering my days, and with industrious thought;
> With the ever-welcome company of books;
> With virtuous friendship's soul-sustaining aid,
> And with blessings of domestic love.
> (5. 50-59)[2]

All the same, such thanks are hardly appropriate. It may be that compared to Margaret, whose tale of abandonment and early death comprises Book I, or to the Solitary, whose "wandering course of discontent" has claimed our attention since then, the Poet is indeed "happy." But on purely poetic grounds, in terms of *The Excursion* that is, the Poet has done little more than demonstrate his affinity with these two tragic subjects rather than with his otherwise cheerful guide the Wanderer, usually thought to be a mouthpiece for Wordsworth. This begins as early, perhaps, as the famous "Prospectus,"

*William Galperin is writing a book on Wordsworth and the modern tradition.

[1] *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph H. Orth and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), IX, 123.

[2] References throughout are to the text of *The Excursion* edited by E. De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), V, 1-312. All references to *The Prelude* are to the 1805 version of the poem edited by De Selincourt and revised by Darbishire in *The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

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affixed to the introduction to *The Excursion*, where the Poet, for all his bravado, remains curiously tentative and uninspired. But it is not until the close of Book I, where the Poet identifies himself as Margaret's "brother" by literally sharing her "impoten[t] . . . grief" (923-24), that the full extent of his vulnerability is known.

I am aware, of course, that to those familiar with *The Excursion*, my concern over the disposition of the Poet may well seem beside the point. After all, compared to his predecessor in *The Prelude*, the speaker here is arguably a cipher whose only purpose is to recall events and conversations and to occasionally transcribe narratives none of which concern him directly, save perhaps in Book I. Critical attention has focussed on other aspects of *The Excursion*, most notably the other characters whom the Poet encounters and who, by turns, encounter each other: the Wanderer, whom we meet in Book I and who remains the major spokesman on behalf of traditional beliefs; the Solitary, whom the Poet and the Wanderer visit in Book II and, though clearly representative of the spirit of the age, remains a foil for the Wanderer's conventional wisdom; and finally, the Pastor, whom all three encounter in the second half of the poem and who serves both as narrator of epitaphs and as mediator of the dispute between the two previous characters—this despite the fact that his views rarely differ from the Wanderer's. Still, what troubles me in all of this is that few have wondered why this is the case, why a poet who had just fashioned an epic out of the growth of his own mind would be disposed now to remove himself from a poem altogether, leaving behind only some stick-figures who may or may not represent sides to his own character. Could this absence be another way of asserting his presence, a new way of seeing? Or, could the various presences in *The Excursion*, such as they are, be a new way of asserting the poet's absence, his inability to formulate an inclusive organizing myth? Such questions have never really been asked of *The Excursion*, except as they may occasionally pertain to one of the characters—the Wanderer, for instance, whose "strange reticence" was recently the subject of a full-length essay.[3] Nor has much attention—or significance—been given to the fact that *The Excursion* is entirely a recollection, which seems to me an even more glaring omission. Not only is memory an

[3] David Q. Smith, "The Wanderer's Silence: A Strange Reticence in Book IX of *The Excursion*," *The Wordsworth Circle*, 9 (1978), 162-72.

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abiding Wordsworthian concern, but, as we shall see, it raises the Poet to the level of poet, placing him at last within a greater Romanticism to which Wordsworth would have hardly aspired had he not, in fact, created a need for it in *The Prelude*.

Thus, the Poet's situation does not change much on *The Excursion*'s "second" day where his obvious reluctance to recall the Wanderer without the mediation of a Margaret or, in this case, the Solitary, underscores Wordsworth's equal reluctance merely to "ventriloquiz[e] through [the Wanderer's] mouth."[4] While the Wanderer contrives, in other words, to "correct" the "despondency" that afflicts both Margaret and now the Solitary, his efforts generally fail. His contention at the close of Book I, for example, that Margaret "endures by faith rather than by wish-fulfillment"[5] seems completely to disregard the ironies inherent in her decline, which suggest that there is no distinction between the two, that Margaret "linger[s] in unquiet widowhood,/A Wife and Widow" (873-74). And later, in response to the Solitary for whom "hope and memory" are likewise "as one" (3. 100), the Wanderer can do no better than summon the examples of two children who, by virtue of their age alone, cannot possibly distinguish between desire and its object, as in the "curious child" listening to the ocean in a sea-shell (4. 1133-40). All the same, when the Poet recalls the Solitary and his succession of "glittering bride[s]" (3. 735), it becomes clear that the years that bring the philosophic mind quickly separate desire from its object so that the "ear of Faith" (4. 1143) must now build up greatest things from least suggestions.[6]

In this way, then, the second leg of *The Excursion* is even more disheartening than the first, "end[ing] without peace" and "inviting sleep and soft forgetfulness" (4. 1325)—which returns us, in effect, to the problem with which we began, for when we next encounter him in Book V, the Poet has apparently accepted the invitation. The

[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Table Talk" (July 21, 1832) in *The Complete Works*, ed. W. G. T. Shedd (New York: Harper and Bros., 1860), p. 403.

[4] Lucio P. Ruotolo, "Wordsworth's Religious Hope: A Study of the Margaret Story," *Renascence*, 24 (1972), 101.

[5] This is most evident in the Solitary's repeated millenarianism which, whether it be his vision of the New Jerusalem at the close of Book II (830-31), his marriage in Book III, or his involvement in the French Revolution (also in Book III), always entails a "colour[ing of] objects to his desire/As with a lover's passion" (2. 277-78) in an attempt to transform a "struggling and distempered world" (3. 804) into a "confusion infinite of heaven and earth" (3.721).

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only question is why? To answer this, however, we must examine first the origins of the poetic form of *The Excursion*, the use, that is, to which this unusual form was originally put.

Composed in 1798 when Wordsworth's "uniformitarian" beliefs were at their height, the earliest version of Book I of *The Excursion* (and the basis, as a result, for the poem's form) has been frequently noted for its demonstration of the salutary effects of the sympathetic imagination. These, it has been argued, were the result of a unique poetic strategy in which the task of narrating Margaret's story was deliberately assigned to one of the poem's characters, the Pedlar (later to become the Wanderer), in order that the actual speaker, the Poet, might portray himself as someone who, "like the reader, . . . simply listens and responds." By "identifying" his speaker with the reader, Wordsworth was able then to create a sense of dramatic "involvement" on the part of the reader and to establish parity among the poem's major participants who now include the reader, the Poet, the Pedlar and the subject of the poem, Margaret. Thus Margaret's tragedy becomes, by turns, a collective experience: less individualized, less spectacular and, as a result, less tragic.[7]

Such, however, is not the case in *The Excursion* if only because, as Wordsworth hints in Book V, the strategy never really worked in the first place. Indeed, rather than engaging the reader in the only way a text can, by forcing him, as Wolfgang Iser observes, to "[work] things out for himself," the poetic form inaugurated in *The Ruined Cottage* and continued in *The Excursion* seems to encourage the very opposite, enlisting the Poet as the reader's proxy in all responses including catharsis.[8] Thus relieved of any emotional or intellectual challenge,

[7] Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (London: Nelson, 1969), pp. 87-153. See also Neil Hertz, "Wordsworth and the Tears of Adam," *Studies in Romanticism*, 7 (1967), 15-23.

[8] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), p. 275. As will be plain throughout my essay, I am indebted to Iser for his articulation of the problem of "reader involvement" as it pertains to the phenomenology of reading. Yet inasmuch as Iser is concerned entirely with prose fiction rather than with the strange conflation of narrative and lyric found in either *The Prelude* or *The Excursion*, I have been forced at times to make fairly free use of his terms and concepts. "Negations," for instance, which Iser regards as questionings of social norms and regulations (which makes sense in terms of the novel) become in *The Excursion* those means by which Wordsworth forces the reader to question certain *perceptual* norms apparently sanctioned in the first four books of the poem.

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the reader has no reason to continue reading unless, of course, we regard the act of reading as a totally passive enterprise—which it may well be if we can take seriously the self-portrait of the Poet in the "ever-welcome company of [his] books."[9] But for Wordsworth, who regarded reading as much more creative, so much so as to include the reader in his definition of the poet (a man speaking to men), this apparent transformation in the character of the Poet is partly an act of self-criticism, allowing him to share the ultimate consequences of his adoption (one might argue usurpation) of the readerly role, while simultaneously forcing certain auditory responsibilities upon the implied reader which he may have forgotten ever existed. And why? Because Wordsworth had no choice in the matter. *The Excursion* remains, however flawed, a sequel to the then unpublished *Prelude*, and, more specifically, to the problem of audience which Wordsworth became increasingly aware of as he sought to bring *The Prelude* to "its appointed close" (13. 270).[10]

What Wordsworth learned as he sought to wrench his inner life to fit a preposterously heroic pattern was something he might not have learned any other way: that subjectivism and imagination, far from becoming the only conditions for absolute order, led rather to a paralyzing sense of individuation in which the "universe of death" (13. 141) was suddenly everywhere apparent. Chastened, then, by this new vulnerability, yet determined to communicate it to his reader in the hope that by living with it both might arrive at a truly adequate support for "the calamites of mortal life" (*Exc.* 4. 11), Wordsworth proceeded very early in *The Excursion* to correct the most serious problem in *The Prelude*—the almost bellicose assumption that he could, "by simple waving of a wand, . . . instantaneously" displace the "universe of death" with a "beauty. . .of substance and of fabric more divine" (*Prel.* 11. 79-80, 13. 451-52). If such displacement was to take place (and Wordsworth was by no means certain that it would

[9] Perhaps the most suspicious aspect of this portrait of the reader is its unWordsworthian reverence for books themselves which in *The Prelude* were viewed as *impediments* to perception, enabling us "to live/In reconcilement with our stinted powers" (5. 540-41). Wordsworth, needless to say, regarded his own books as performing a very different function.

[10] For a full discussion of this essay "'Turns and Counter-turns': The Crisis of Sincerity in the Final Books of *The Prelude*," *MLQ*, 40 (1979), 256-74.

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as evidenced by the almost meandering nature of the "Prospectus"), it could only proceed now at considerable sacrifice, in full knowledge of the limits of imagination and, as the Poet's affinity with Margaret and the Solitary also suggests, in recognition of his vulnerability to the "deadly weight" (*Prel.* 11. 262) of life itself. Nor was this the only sacrifice at issue; in an attempt to show his reader that he had learned to live within his means, Wordsworth found himself in the position of having to risk losing that reader, of having to place the Poet in the relatively passive role as listener thereby interposing him between the implied reader and the responsibility that might fall to the reader in a pluralistic drama of this nature. Still, Wordsworth had no choice in the matter. While *The Excursion* remains, once again, the Poet's recollection of a five day incursion into the lives and sentiments of others, this fact had to be deemphasized so that memory, albeit memory of a less intensely subjective kind than that associated with Wordsworth, might eventually be enlisted as a stay against "solitary anguish" (Prospectus. 77). Thus, in order to return to the self, in order to move, in Wallace Stevens' words, "beyond forgetfulness," the Poet had first to embrace forgetfulness as it was only by forgetting or at least trying to forget that the Poet could demonstrate his continued vulnerability and yet demonstrate *to the reader* the ultimate need of what Stevens would later call a "cure of ourselves." [11]

In this way, the Poet had to trade places with the reader not once, but twice in the poem: first, by adopting the auditory role in Book I, and, more importantly, by relinquishing it in Book V when the reader was perhaps least prepared to assume its antithetical responsibilities of identifying with the Solitary while wanting to share the Wanderer's belief in a "support" for the vicissitudes of "mortal life." Hence, it is clearly no accident that Wordsworth waited until *after* the Wanderer had defined his version of this support in Book IV and had "corrected" the Solitary's despondency before instituting this change. Like his debilitating kinship to Margaret, the Poet's nostalgic attachment to the Wanderer was something that also had to be forgotten if Wordsworth were to "generate a new syntax" in which the "syntax of . . . description" would remain *consistent* with that of "the moralizing." [12]

[11] "The Rock," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954), p. 526.

[12] Earl R. Wasserman, *The Subtler Language* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1959), p. 184. The problem in the later eighteenth-century poem

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But why did Wordsworth not simply make a more direct, more secularized appeal to his reader instead of proceeding, as he does in Book V, to introduce the Pastor whose views are virtually identical to the Wanderer's? The answer, I think, is two-fold. In the first, Wordsworth had already made an appeal in *The Prelude* which, despite his disingenuous allusion to it in the introduction to *The Excursion*, was hardly a "subsidiary" work concerned only with the "origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them." Indeed, *The Prelude* would probably have become *The Excursion* (as it briefly attempted in Books XII and XIII)[13] had Wordsworth persuaded himself that he had actually shown "how the mind of man becomes... more beautiful than the earth/On which he dwells" (13. 445-48) prior to his valedictory promise to further "instruct" us in that very phenomenon. Nevertheless, the more important reason for Wordsworth's reluctance to deal directly with his reader has to do with *The Excursion* itself, with the fact that from Book V on, the poem contrives through various "negations" to "impel the reader to seek" what Iser terms "a positive counterbalance," creating as it were *a need* that only Wordsworth can then satisfy.[14] Thus, while the speaker has apparently resigned his dual-role as "tried Friend" of the Wanderer (1. 52) and "silent" partner to both Margaret and the

that Wasserman addresses in his brilliant chapter "Metaphors for Poetry" is one equally endemic to the Wanderer's arguments in which there is always a "bifurcation" between the natural and the moral—such as in his description of the flight of the "solitary raven" (4. 1178-87) where the description, a testament to ordinary sensory perception, is suddenly proof that "Nature fails not" to "glorify the Eternal" (4. 1169, 1165).

[13] Although Wordsworth speaks in *The Prelude* of a future work in which he will "endeavor to unfold the means/Which Nature studiously summons all the senses each/To counteract the other and themselves,/And makes them all, and the objects with which all/Are conversant, subservient in their turn/To the great ends of Liberty and Power" (ll. 178-84), this "mater for another Song" (l. 185) becomes, at least in part, the "matter" of *The Prelude* so that by the end of the poem Wordsworth has both promised a "work...of [our] redemption, surely yet to come" (13. 441) and has just completed one in which such "redemption" ("hence religion, faith,...hence truth in moral judgments and delight/That fails not in the external universe" [13. 110-19]) has apparently been achieved.

[14] Iser, p. xxi. Iser regards this search for a "counterbalance" as a means to force the reader "to take an active part in the composition of [a work's] meaning" which is precisely, I believe, what Wordsworth has in mind in *The Excursion*.

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Solitary, it is only for the purpose of allowing the reader to set finally the poem "in motion" himself, resulting in what Iser describes as "the awakening of [his] responses"—responses which in Wordsworth would be similar no doubt to those awakened in the Poet and, even earlier, in the speaker of *The Prelude* as he struggled to bring that poem to its triumphant close.[15]

This strategy first becomes apparent quite early in Book V when the Solitary moves to resume the previous day's debate, giving the lie to any supposition that his "despondency" was "corrected." "Much, yesterday," he begins,

> was said in glowing phrase
> Of our sublime dependencies, and hopes
> For future states of being; and the wings
> Of speculation, joyfully outspread,
> Hovered above our destiny on earth:
> But stoop, and place the prospect of the soul
> In sober contrast with reality,
> And man's substantial life. If this mute earth
> Of what it holds could speak, and every grave
> Were as a volume, shut, yet capable
> Of yielding its contents to eye and ear,
> We should recoil, stricken with sorrow or shame,
> To see disclosed, by such dread proof, how ill
> That which is done accords with what is known
> To reason, and by conscience is enjoined;
> How idly, how perversely, life's whole course,
> To this conclusion, deviates from the line,
> Or of the end stops short, proposed to all
> At her aspiring outset.
>
> (243-61)

On the one hand, this is plainly a challenge which the Wanderer and then the Pastor will endeavor to meet. On the other hand, however, it is a challenge likely to remain unchallenged unless, of course, the implied reader can rise up (or indeed "stoop") to meet it; for in the aftermath of the Poet's defection to the ranks of the "[un]-troubled," the reader has become the only other participant in the poem *not* under obligation to regard the "prospect of the soul" as part of "man's substantial life." But there is clearly a problem in this: in order

[15] Iser, p. 275.

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to challenge the Solitary and begin the task of working things out for himself, the reader must effectively comply with the Solitary without losing his newly acquired autonomy as a creative thinker. Consequently, Wordsworth chooses this very occasion to reassign not only the auditory role, but its general disposition as well, creating a split in the mind of the reader over the validity of the Solitary's views as personal observations and their objective validity as ideas. "Far better," continues the Solitary,

> not to move at all than move
> By impulse sent from such illusive power,—
> That finds and cannot fasten down; that grasps
> And is rejoiced, and loses while it grasps;
> That tempts, emboldens—for a time sustains,
> And then betrays; accuses and inflicts
> Remorseless punishment; and so retreads
> The inevitable circle.
>
> (321-28)

In terms of his own experience, which up until now has been in the foreground generating sympathy for his viewpoint, the Solitary has had every reason to equate mutability with betrayal. But much like the Wanderer, the Solitary wants now to be a representative man which leads in turn to a hardening of his position. Take, for example, his phrase "the inevitable circle" which is contradictory at best and, at worst, indicative of a belief that human existence is deterministic, if not linear, in orientation, a course in which betrayal and remorse are more permanent ends than joy or sustenance. Or, several lines later, when the Solitary again invokes the circle, this time the "circling year," only to conclude that "life, as with the multitude, . . . is fashioned like an ill constructed tale;/That on the outset wastes its gay desires, . . . it enlivening hopes, . . . for the sequel leaving/Old things repeated with diminished grace" (431-35). Both of these claims reflect a general argumentativeness, a leap, if you will, from the particular to the universal, that was nowhere apparent in Book III. Yet even so, neither is quite so challenging, or so poignant, as that which precedes the last:

> Grant that Spring is there,
> In spite of many a rough untoward blast,
> Hopeful and promising with buds and flowers;
> Yet where is glowing Summer's long rich day, . . .

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> And mellow Autumn charged with bounteous fruit,
> Where is she imaged? in what favoured clime
> Her lavish pomp, and ripe magnificence?
>
> (395-402)

This, then, is the first real "negation" with which the reader has had to contend in his new role and it should "end," as Iser observes, "with a questioning rather than a confirmation of [its] validity."[16] After all, if *The Excursion* has taught the reader one thing, it is that there exists, for better or worse, a correspondence between the world of nature and that of man. Thus far the relationship has been saddeningly one-sided, revealing a grim, if unWordsworthian, correspondence between the ravages of selfhood and those of nature. But now, in a sense not intended by him, the Solitary has introduced what the reader cannot but regard as a new dimension to this relationship: the possibility that life, particularly the life of the mind as it is "image" that the Solitary speaks of, may be less a movement in linear time than a true reflection of the year, a condition in which want and desolation are perpetually separated by "ripe magnificence" and "internal warmth." He has, in other words, furnished the reader with an alternative vision or, more properly, a vocabulary in which a valid opposition to his vision can be grounded.

Yet lest the reader be tempted to ignore this disclosure and challenge the Solitary along more conventional lines, he is confronted with a further negation in the unlikely figure of the Pastor who, by his appearance at this juncture, immediately exposes the reader to the additional prerogative of rejecting *all* of the poem's viewpoints for the sake of something better. While the Pastor is introduced presumably to answer the Solitary's complaints by "giv[ing] us, for our abstractions, solid facts, . . .for our disputes, plain pictures," the very first of these pictures merely demonstrates that there exists for all three disputants an insuperable gulf between what each perceives to be the facts of life and the "solid facts" themselves. I am referring, specifically, to the "childless couple" who, of all the Pastor's examples, remain the only ones "from the living" (670), which may explain, in part, why theirs is living of a most moribund order—a struggle in which the Matron, for one, must devise various strategies to help cope with the spirit of solitude:

[16] Iser, p. xii.

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'Three dark mid-winter months
Pass,' said the Matron, 'and I never see,
Save when the Sabbath brings its kind release,
My helpmate's face by light of day. He quits
His door in darkness, nor till dusk returns.
And, through Heaven's blessing, thus we gain the bread
For which we pray; and for the wants provide
Of sickness, accident, and helpless age.
Companions have I many; many friends,
Dependants, comforters—my wheel, my fire,
All day the house-clock ticking in mine ear,
The cackling hen, the tender chicken brood,
And the wild birds that gather round my porch....
But, above all, my thoughts are my support,
My comfort.

(804-24)

That the Matron is able to derive "comfort" from her own "thoughts may sound reassuring; yet the Wanderer's recollection of a chance encounter with this same woman several years earlier leaves little doubt that though the Matron may "beguile," by various means, "the summer's day and winter's" (708-10), her fancy cannot cheat so well:

A tired way-faring man, once I was brought
While traversing alone yon mountain-pass.
Dark on my road the autumnal evening fell,
And night succeeded with unusual gloom,
So hazardous that feet and hands became
Guides better than mine eyes—until a light
High in the gloom appeared, too high, methought,
For human habitation; but I longed
To reach it, destitute of other hope....
Thought I—some friendly covert must be near.
With this persuasion thitherward my steps
I turn, and reach at last the guiding light;
Joy to myself! but to the heart of her
Who there was standing on the open hill,
(The same kind Matron whom your tongue hath praised)
Alarm and disappointment! The alarm
Ceased, when she learned through what mishap I came...
Drawn from her cottage, on the aery height,
Bearing a lantern in her hand she stood,
Or paced the ground—to guide her Husband home

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> By that unwearied signal, kenned afar;
> An anxious duty!
>
> (734-62)

Separated from her husband by the impenetrable "gloom" of night, the Matron is engaged in the very probable task of directing his return. Or is she? While bearing a lantern certainly serves a practical function, she is also guiding him by pacing the ground, by *willing* him home. Fortunately, her "anxious duty" does not go unrequited. Her "helpmate" returns and the woman regains her composure. Yet having *witnessed* what is a daily occurrence in the lives of these people, it is impossible to concur with the Pastor's contention that they have received "abundant recompense for every want" (727) or with the Wanderer's judgment that they remain, by virtue of their "privations," "richer in the main . . . [than] thankless thousands . . . opprest and clogged/By ease and leisure" (829-31). What these two men "give us" are not simply "abstractions" that have little basis in fact, but abstractions that have somehow taken the place of facts—reversions, if you will, to the "aery alchem[y]" (633) that the Wanderer was especially at pains to avoid.

Nevertheless, to charge either the Wanderer or the Pastor with having reneged on a stated agreement is to overlook the fact that their reversions here are less a matter of cunning than of belief, of an unshakable conception of human existence so false yet so harmonious, that each persists in referring to these people as a "couple" even when everything suggests that theirs is more a separation than a union. Neither man is capable of perceiving, much less understanding, that the real problem and the basis of the entire dispute is individuation, and what is more, individuation which threatens (as the Matron herself implies) to erode the very beliefs on which their views are founded:

> would that [my thoughts] were oftener fixed
> On what, for guidance in the way that leads
> To heaven, I know, by my Redeemer taught.
>
> (824-26)

Oscillating between the certainty of knowing and the uncertainty of hoping, the Matron presents us with a most puzzling conclusion, though one which, for all its eddying, reminds us what can (and does) happen when one "turn[s] inward" (3. 696) and must rely upon oneself as a sole means of support. Hence, it does not matter that the

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Matron has not yet consciously made this turn or that her self-reliance is complemented by, among other things, religious faith. Self-reliance, we must remember, is not the equivalent of selfhood as much as its acknowledgment—which need not consist of suffering its effects. Like the Solitary, and earlier, the figure of Margaret, the Matron too has unwittingly betrayed herself and been driven by desire onto a darkling plain where there is no light, no recompense, save her own uneasy hope.

The Solitary, for his part, remains unconvinced by this demonstration, and that is not at all surprising. What is surprising, however, are the reasons for his disagreement which have little to do either with the account itself or with the obvious parallels between the Matron's experience and his own. They are based entirely, in fact, upon his recollection of the "poor Pensioner" whom he saved in Book II and who, "if living now," he maintains, "could otherwise report . . . [on] what solitude can breed . . . or . . . hath not power to cure" (881-90). Which must count, I think, as another of the poem's readerly "negations," as something, that is, to which the reader cannot respond *except* by entering "a world not immediately familiar to him," [17] a world where, in this case, he can oppose the Solitary only by *sharing* his skepticism, by realizing that the example of the Matron supports the Solitary's position on "solitude" and its "dim and perilous way" (3. 701). Hence, the reader's role has enlarged to the point where it is he, rather than the Pastor, who has become the poem's chief arbiter, and he must now make certain determinations that none of the poem's participants, not even the Poet, is likely to echo and thereby reaffirm. Nor is it accidental that the reader achieves this status prior to the Pastor's sixteen epitaphs which will essentially test his autonomy, though not, oddly enough, by either their content alone or even their sheer bulk—nearly 2500 lines in all. Rather, the principal challenge for the reader (and one reason, I suspect, for Wordsworth's decision to devote so much space to many different stories the majority of which refute the Wanderer's pious judgments upon them) comes not in whether he can possibly exercise his readerly prerogative of reluctantly siding with the Solitary, but in whether he will be able, as a result of of this alliance, to ask *himself* the central question which effectively inaugurated his involvement in the poem to begin with:

[17] Iser, p. xii.

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> Yet where is glowing Summer's long rich day . . . ?
> And mellow Autumn, charged with bounteous fruit,
> Where is she imaged in what favoured clime . . . ? [18]

And only then, will Wordsworth provide the answer, though in such a way now that the reader will feel that this is something he has achieved on his own, so that Keats, for example, the most famous of *The Excursion's* admirers, may have gone ahead and written "To Autumn." [19] Indeed, it was in this way, by creating a situation in which the needs of the poem were roughly identical to those of its respondent, that Wordsworth sought to reestablish the ties between the poet and his audience that were largely severed atop Mount Snowdon.

[18] Although it is hardly within the province of this essay to engage in detailed analysis of each of the individual epitaphs, suffice it to say that their effect upon the reader is arguably identical to the effect of Margaret upon the Poet in Book I where the latter was put in greater touch with his own individuation through his encounter with the individuated Margaret. Nevertheless, to ensure that the reader would imitate the Poet in this regard, Wordsworth was compelled to repeat this encounter again and again with a variety of subjects, most of whom resemble Margaret and the Solitary in their "intense and overconstant yearning" and in their solitude: the widower who refuses to remarry (6. 1115-91); the botanist who "loved fondly, truly, fervently . . . but sued in vain" (6. 118-61); Ellen who, like Margaret, is also deserted (6. 983-1052); another widower whose memory of his wife was rekindled and then disappointed by the death of his granddaughter (7. 632-94); the "patriarch" who survives his entire family even his "grandchild" (7. 242-91); the ill-requited Priest who, even in old age, "retained flashing eye, a burning palm/A stirring foot" (7. 111-241); and so on. The difference is that while the Poet's exposure to Margaret comes at a point in the poem when he is seemingly ill-equipped to deal with her, the reader's exposure to "the scattered subjects which compose/Earth's melancholy vision" (5. 935-36) comes only after he has managed, in effect, to obtain a trump card in the Solitary's hitherto unanswered complaint. The epitaphs, then, "challenge" him to play his trump which leads, by turns, to his "discovery" of "a new reality which, at least in part, is different from the world [the reader] himself is used to" (Iser, p. xiii).

[19] While Keats's admiration for *The Excursion*, which he regarded as one of of the three greatest achievements of his age, remains a fairly well-kept secret, critics have raised the possibility that the "Odes" may have been profoundly influenced by *The Excursion*. For a discussion of the relationship between "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and *The Excursion*, see Mario L. D'Avanzo, "'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and *The Excursion*," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 23 (1974), 95-105. For a more general discussion of Keats's dialogue with *The Excursion*, particularly as it influenced his early poetry and aesthetics, see H. W. Piper, *The Active Universe* (London: Athalone Press, 1962).

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Still, we may wonder what all of this has to do with the sixteen epitaphs in Books V, VI, and VII of *The Excursion*? The answer, then, is that by their similarity of method, the epitaphs should "impel" the reader in what I take to be the opposite direction, in a direction aesthetically opposed to the epitaphic mode.[20] In other words, far from being practical demonstrations of the poet's theory of the genre in his "Essay upon Epitaphs," the epitaphs in *The Excursion* remain, by Wordsworthian standards, overly ambitious, aspiring to be both "monuments" and poems: monuments in their memorial function and poems in that they contrive, in almost every instance, to "[dissect] the internal frame of mind" as well.[21] Thus, they too are "negations," reminding the reader that while physical life can be subjected to the foreshortening necessary to the epitaphical function, the life of the mind calls for a different kind of memorial, for a monument more in keeping with human interiority or internal time.

As a result, the most important features of *The Excursion*'s climax and resolution in Books VIII and IX are, not surprisingly, the timescape, which corresponds to subjective time in its careful, almost static deliberation, and the attention to detail, which together yield a gradual movement from the strictly visual to the visionary—a movement so gradual, that it is almost impossible to mark its beginning. In retrospect, though, it is clear that the climax begins in rather anti-climactic fashion, or what would be anti-climactic fashion were it not that the Poet's description of the Pastor's house and surrounding landscape stands in distinct contrast to the temporality of Books VI and VII. This is then followed by a description of the Pastor's wife and daughter and finally, his son and son's "companion":

> suddenly the door
> Flew open, and a pair of lusty Boys

[20] By no means is this the only function of the epitaphs, though it may well be their only function in the poem. In addition to allowing Wordsworth the opportunity to explore the genre first hand by writing epitaphs for actual persons who had lived in Hawkshead, the numerous epitaphs here reflect his continued interest in the elegiac mode in general which, as early as *Lyrical Ballads*, often took a narrative form not unlike many of the Pastor's stories. Nevertheless, within the overall structure of *The Excursion*, the epitaphs are an anti-strophe to the poem's climax and resolution largely because of their timescape, but also because of their generally depressing content—both of which stand in distinct contrast to the poem's close.

[21] *Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth*, ed. Paul M. Zall (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 101.

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Appeared, confusion checking their delight.
—Not brothers they in feature or attire,
But fond companions, so I guessed, in field,
And by the river's margin—whence they come,
Keen anglers with unusual spoil elated.
One bears a willow-pannier on his back,
The boy of plainer garb, whose blush survives
More deeply tinged. Twin might the other be
To that fair girl who from the garden-mount
Bounded:—triumphant entry this for him!
(8. 544-55)

Already, the Poet's sense of time has begun to dissolve so that what began as a recollection becomes suddenly a transcription of events in the present, virtually at the advent of their perception. But it is not until the next book, until the excursion within *The Excursion*, that the reasons for this time-shift become altogether clear:

Forth we went
And down the vale along the streamlet's edge
Pursued our way, a broken company,
Mute or conversing, single or in pairs.
Thus having reached a bridge, that overarched
The hasty rivulet where it lay becalmed
In a deep pool, by happy chance we saw
A twofold image; on a grassy bank
A snow-white ram, and in the crystal flood
Another and the same! Most beautiful,
On the green turf, with his imperial front
Shaggy and bold, and wreathed horns superb,
The breathing creature stood; as beautiful
Beneath him, showed his shadowy counterpart.
Each had his glowing mountains, each his sky,
And each seemed centre of his own fair world:
Antipodes unconscious of each other,
Yet, in partition, with their several spheres
Blended in perfect stillness, to our sight!
(9. 433-51)

This amounts no less to a vision of completeness which, in addition to being the very first of its kind in *The Excursion*, becomes through its various implications a "more-than-visual" experience.[22] It is not

[22] Harold Bloom, "Visionary Cinema of Romantic Poetry," *The Ringers in the Tower* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 81. In a poem rife with

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simply the "ram" that is "blended" with its "antipod[e] . . . in perfect stillness," but the entire visible universe, the orders of both man and nature—so that just as the "broken company" is seemingly united by this mutual experience ("we saw . . . our sight"), external nature is also divested of its chaotic multiplicity and restored to a kind of order, and what is more, an order accessible to the reader, *yet relative* to the Poet's individual experience.

Nevertheless, a "partition" does exist, and it remains, as may be expected, a more-than-visual problem, especially for those to whom privileged moments are very much a matter of privilege:

> "Ah! what a pity were it to disperse,
> Or to disturb, so fair a spectacle,
> And yet a breath can do it!"
> These few words
> The Lady whispered, while we stood and gazed
> Gathered together, all in still delight,
> Not without awe. Thence passing on, she said
> In like low voice to my particular ear . . .
> ". . .sometimes I feel, as now
> That combinations so serene and bright
> Cannot be lasting in a world like ours,
> Whose highest beauty, beautiful as it is
> Like that reflected in yon quiet pool,
> *Seems* but a fleeting sunbeam's gift, whose peace
> The sufferance only of a breath of air!"
> (453-73, my italics)

Although the Pastor's wife rightly underscores the limits of this experience (and, in a passage not quoted, the limitations of the Wanderer's wisdom), she does not deny its authenticity or even its staying power, implying, then, what the Poet makes plain several lines later: that this moment has become, regardless of its transience, a genuine "gift," the personal "property" of each of its witnesses, including the reader, and a more permanent bequest than its temporality suggests.

> "Turn where we may," said I, "we cannot err
> In this delicious region."—Cultured slopes,
> Wild tracts of forest-ground, and scattered groves,

widows, widowers and other assorted solitaries, the sight of the ram who, by accident of nature, has *achieved* his measure of completeness takes on symbolic significance.

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And mountains bare, or clothed with ancient woods,
Surrounded us; and, as we held our way
Along the level of the glassy flood,
They ceased not to surround us; change of place,
From kindred features diversely combined,
Producing change of beauty ever new.
—Ah! that such beauty, varying in the light
Of living nature, cannot be portrayed
By words, nor by the pencil's silent skill;
But is the property of him alone
Who hath beheld it, noted it with care
And in his mind recorded it with love!
(503-17)

The divine afflatus here (suggested by the Poet's conscious resemblance to the Creator in *Genesis* 1 who likewise beheld all visible nature and saw that it was good) is not simply bombast. Clearly, it is Wordsworth's intention in these pages to demonstrate how the "beauty" of nature depends upon a hierarchical arrangement in which man, though still part of the natural order, is capable through memory of possessing and controlling nature, emptying it of its mutability and replacing *that* "with unity sublime" (608). "We clomb a green hill's side," continues the Poet,

and as we clomb,
The Valley, opening out her bosom, gave
Fair prospect, intercepted less and less
O'er the flat meadows and indented coast
Of the smooth lake, in compass seen. . . .
Soft heath this elevated spot supplied,
And choice of moss-clad stones, whereon we couched
Or sate reclined; admiring quietly
The general aspect of the scene; but each
Not seldom over anxious to make known
His own discoveries; or to favourite points
Directing notice, merely from a wish
To impart a joy, imperfect while unshared.
That rapturous moment never shall I forget
When these particular interests were effaced
From every mind!—Already had the sun,
Sinking with less than ordinary state,
Attained his western bound; but rays of light—

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Now suddenly diverging from the orb
Retired behind the mountain-tops or veiled
By the dense air—shot upwards to the crown
Of the blue firmament—aloft and wide:
And multitudes of little floating clouds,
Through their ethereal texture pierced. . .
had become
Vivid as fire; clouds separately poised,—
Innumerable multitude of forms
Scattered through half the circle of the sky;
And giving back, and shedding each on each,
With prodigal communion, the bright hues
Which from the apparent fount of glory
They had imbibed, and ceased not receive.
That which the heavens displayed, the liquid deep
Repeated; but with unity sublime!
(569-608)

The most important aspect of this long passage (and one indeed confirmed by the fact of its existence, not to mention its uncharacteristic power) is the Poet's resolve "never" to "forget." For in his decision always to remember this "rapturous moment" the Poet asserts his belief in the curative powers of memory, abandoning his earlier posture of "forgetfulness" and providing, as its Stevensian analogue suggests, a more modest, more sophisticated alternative to the cure of imagination in *The Prelude*.[23] Confronted, that is, with a world in which there is a correspondence between the ravages of nature and those of self and where imagination is the handmaiden of desire, the best one can do, submits Wordsworth, is to establish an inner world where "hope and memory are as one," where certain discrete

[23] On this score, it is noteworthy that the ram episode was designated for *The Prelude* originally (p. 581), though with a difference: in the Ms. Y version of 1804 the poet no sooner sees the ram than is tempted to disrupt the reflection by throwing a stone in the lake, which explains, I think, why the episode found its way into *The Excursion*. Unlike the other "spot of time," the sight of the ram does *not* (as the poet's impulse plainly indicates) reflect an autonomous imagination where the "mind is lord and master" (ll. 271-72). But now that Wordsworth has learned to live within his means, what would not suffice in *The Prelude* is more than "adequate" for *The Excursion*. Nor is the emphasis here on the antipodal nature of the reflection simply evidence of a "verbose religiosity" (Stephen J. Spector, "Wordsworth's Mirror Imagery and the Picturesque Tradition," *ELH*, 44 [1977], 100).

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moments are permanently enshrined to insure that life will remain "a true reflection of the circling year,/With *all* its seasons" (5. 394-95, my italics). Thus he ends *The Excursion* with what Rossetti later called "a moment's monument," yet one which, more than "a sonnet," derives its power from the Poet's ability to recollect the past with such patience and deliberation that it adopts, by turns, the "for[m] of present things." After all, only by using interior time as a counterpoise to linear time, creating, as it were, an eternal present, can Wordsworth be fairly certain that this rapturous moment will become the mutual "property" of Poet and reader and "[p]erfect *while* [s]hared" (my italics).

But this is not the only ending to *The Excursion*. The moment just described is interrupted throughout by a long "discourse of the Wanderer" and then punctuated by a vesper service led by the Pastor. These are then followed by the poem's real conclusion: the Solitary's leavetaking and the Poet's curiously negative promise to continue the account of the Solitary's regeneration, a vow which like that at the close of *The Prelude*, serves only to remind us that the Pastor and Wanderer have, by their escape from injury, done little to inspire such "future labcurs":

> To enfeebled Power
> From this communion with uninjured Minds,
> What renovation had been brought; and what
> Degree of healing to a wounded spirit,
> Dejected, and habitually disposed
> To seek, in degradation of the Kind,
> Excuse and solace for her own defects;
> How far those erring notions were reformed;
> And whether aught, of tendency as good
> And pure, from future intercourse ensued;
> This—if delightful hopes, as heretofore
> Inspire the serious song, and gentle Hearts
> Cherish, and lofty Minds approve the past—
> My future labours may not leave untold.
> (783-96)

By ending the poem *in medias res*, with the poem's participants in the same positions as when we first meet them, including, I think, the Poet whom we essentially encounter in the "Prospectus," Wordsworth indicates that the resolution to *The Excursion* will not be found in any

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of the usual places, that it will remain, as it was for him, an act of discovery. Still, it is surprising how few readers have taken Wordsworth's challenge seriously; how only one, in fact, has apparently realized that the Solitary holds his ground at the end for the same reason that the Wanderer and the Pastor hold theirs: [24] because these three, in a sense, are the extremities between which man must now steer his course—the nostalgic yearning for a bygone system of belief in the latter two, and the despair which issues in the absence of such a system in the first, both of which are echoed in the poem's concluding lines. Nor is it any coincidence that if a middle course exists in *The Excursion*, it exists only through the offices of the Poet whose movement from vulnerability to memory provides a meaningful, though by no means triumphant, support for the calamities of mortal life, and one, moreover, that need not be taken on faith alone. Unlike the judgments of the other spokesman, or the claims of *The Prelude* which are perfect *until* shared, the unforgettable "moment" in Book IX culminates a course that both Poet and reader have followed, so that even at the end, at the one moment when Wordsworth could justifiably resolve the poem in no uncertain terms, the resolution to *The Excursion* remains a matter of choice. And in this, it is as genuine a resolution as a literary work is likely to afford.

[24] E. E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), p. 81.

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ROSS C. MURFIN*

Hymn to Priapus: Lawrence's Poetry of Difference

The speaker of the "Hymn to Priapus," like the speakers in all the other lyrics in D. H. Lawrence's volume of poems entitled *Look! We Have Come Through!*, may be taken to be Lawrence himself. He tells us he "danced at a Christmas party/Under the mistletoe"

> Along with a ripe, slack country lass
> Jostling to and fro.

At the dance or, more likely, after the dance, the country lass "slipped through" the speaker's "arms on the threshing floor," where he found her "Sweet as an armful of wheat." As if words like "armful" and images of "threshing" a "ripe . . . country" woman on the "floor" were not explicit enough to convince us of what has transpired, Lawrence plays blasphemously with Christ's words at the Last Supper. She "was broken, was broken/For me, and ah, it was sweet," Lawrence says, making absolutely clear the fact that "this is [her] body" that the "big, soft country lass" has broken for the remission of his appetites.

Lawrence leaves the barn (as well as the woman) behind, and as he goes home through a silent country landscape he feels "Fulfilled" but also "alone." Part of that feeling of loneliness seems to stem from guilt and even a feeling that some sin has transpired, a fact suggested rather obviously through the presence of words like "commission," somewhat more subtly and potently through the speaker's representation of the constellation Orion as a father figure. He sees "the great Orion standing/Looking down," the "witness" of his "first beloved/Love-making" (which in Lawrence, after Freud, could refer to a child's Oedipal affair). Orion

> Now sees . . . this as well,
> This last commission.
> Nor do I get any look
> Of admonition.

* Ross C. Murfin, an Associate Professor of English at Yale, is the author of *Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence and the Burden of Belief*. He is completing a book on Lawrence's poetry.

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He can add the reckoning up
I suppose, between now and then,
Having walked himself in the thorny, difficult
Ways of men.

Having partaken of the sensual fulfillments offered by a rustic woman and wondered if his father would have words of "admonition," the speaker lapses in the later stanzas of the poem into thoughts of his mother, that sweeter, better love who now

... lies underground
With her face upturned to mine,
And her mouth unclosed in the long last kiss
That ended her life and mine.[1]

"She fares in the stark immortal/Fields of death," Lawrence bitterly complains, and "I in these goodly, frozen/Fields...."[2] She is a Proserpine, Lawrence implies, only she is a Proserpine lost forever to Plutonian darkness. He, the "frozen" inhabitant of sterile "fields," is powerless to bring her to light or love again.

This love for that which Lawrence is powerless to bring back, in turn, breeds a powerful, secondary form of impotence. Any man who spends his time after lovemaking thinking morbid thoughts of his unforgettable mother has clearly not been "fulfilled" by his sexual experience as an adult, no matter what he may claim to the contrary. The impossible love for the mother, as symbolized by the deathbed

[1] It is not necessary to have read biographies of Lawrence to know that the dead beloved is the writer's mother. *Look! We Have Come Through!*—the volume in which the "Hymn to Priapus" appears—contains at least four poems that seek to be, in the words of one title, "Everlasting Flowers for a Dead Mother."

[2] My ellipsis stands in place of the word "beneath." I have not quoted the word in my text because although its presence would in no way damage my argument, it seems a wholly diversionary word the logic (or creative illogic) of which I am not sure I can explain. Why would Lawrence say that he is "beneath" his "underground" love? He cannot be accused of having sacrificed sense for a rhyming word, since "beneath" and "death" form only an eye rhyme anyway. Perhaps "beneath" is intended as a figurative, valuative word. (The mother, although dead, still reigns over her son). Or the poet may intend to recall the downward-looking, male Orion in such a way as to make clear the status of both images as symbols of the parental past and yet confuse corpse and constellation just enough to keep either or both of them from being read too autobiographically.

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kiss, seems to have rendered the poet incapable, for a while at least, of enjoying his own loves in his own time. It has, indeed, turned the course of his life against life itself:

> Something in me remembers
> And will not forget.
> The stream of my life in the darkness
> Deathward set.

I take this stanza to refer, in part, to the returning memory of that "long last kiss/That ended her life and mine." If we suspect, however, that the reference is also to the moment of the poet's own conception, the sexual act between father and mother that brought him into being, the import of the stanza is little changed. For to be so burdened by the past that coitus triggers "memories" of one's own conception is to be a man always driven by reality back into the womb and into the world of the deep, parental past, now quiet like Orion in the blackness of the heavens, now peaceful and still in the "stark immortal fields of death" that stretch beyond the reach of our "frozen/Fields."

One thing is sure. The poem, whatever else it may be, doesn't seem much of a "Hymn to Priapus." The poem hardly can be said to celebrate the sexual relationship abandoned after only three stanzas, and however much Lawrence might hold to a neo-Freudian view of the family, we can hardly suppose that "Priapus" is a figure for the relationship which the poem seems more interested in and certainly talks in more "hymnal" language about, the love between mother and son. Where, then, is Lawrence taking us? What has he written a poem about?

It is only when we consider the fact that the poem associates the mother figure with an immortal, controlling influence over the life of the son, when we realize that the imagery of the poem ("underground," "fields of death") associates the mother with the goddess Proserpine, when we recall that Swinburne, whom Lawrence once called our greatest poet,"[3] wrote not a "Hymn to Priapus" but a "Hymn to Proserpine," and when we remember that the elder poet's hymn treated the subject of two kinds of love, one current but dead—it is only then that we begin to realize what we are encountering

[3] Harry T. Moore, *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Viking, 1962), p. 474.

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in the "Hymn to Priapus." This is a poem that becomes compelling only when we see it interplaying with other poems. Through his title, Lawrence might lead us to expect a poem that is a paean to a simple and primal urge. After we have studied the lines following, however, we take the title as an illustrative admission. The "Hymn to Priapus" is a revisionary "Hymn to Proserpine" that half develops and half covers over the traces of a Victorian original. That is the work, Lawrence makes us realize, that has first to be done before any convincing hymns to sexual being can be sung.

In Swinburne's powerful poem, the speaker, upon the proclamation in Rome of the Christian faith, weeps for the passing of the old, Olympian order (whose gods, once "fair," are now "broken"). He also decries the elevation of a new, pale, son of man who is now "crowned in the city" but whose "days are bare" and "device is barren" to a man raised a passionate devotee of those older, more majestic deities who were "more than the day or the morrow, the seasons that laugh or that weep." The speaker especially laments the passing of Proserpine,

> our mother, a blossom of flowering seas,
> Clothed round with the world's desire as with
> raiment, and fair as the foam,
> And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess and
> Mother of Rome.

Who or what has replaced this "mother" of "desire" in the new scheme of things? A mere girl, Mary, a mere "maiden men sing as a goddess" and have "crowned . . . where another was queen."

In despair, with no object worth desire or devotion in the present and no viable goddess of love left over from the previous epoch, the speaker admits that his life, nurtured in a time and in a view of things now forever past, is now meaningless. "I am sick of singing" and "fain" only "to rest," the Swinburnian speaker sighs (for Swinburne, too, was raised on faiths which were, in his lifetime, "dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day"). He longs only for "sleep"; he would "look to the end," the time in which he will forever join the "hidden head" of Proserpine in "death." "I will go," he says, "as I came," to "abide" in the "earth" with "my mother." In a companion poem, entitled "The Garden of Proserpine," Swinburne associates this death and this mother with "Pale beds of blowing

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rushes/Where no leaf blooms or blushes," and he ends his prayer in the garden on a note of thanks

> That no life lives for ever;
> That dead men rise up never;
> That even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere to the sea.

Swinburne's Proserpine poems would seem to be important sources of Lawrence's images, themes, and larger poetic structures in the "Hymn to Priapus." The elder poet's characterization of life as a weary flow from origins to the finality of death informs both Lawrence's memory of that "stream of [his] life in the darkness . . . set" and his lament, which may ultimately be an anxious hope, that his parents will "rise up never," will never return to repossess him, to offer "admonition," to "add the reckoning up." The dead mother who is also a lover and a deity, who "fares in the stark immortal/Fields of death" with her "underground . . . face upturned" to her son's, clearly descends from Swinburne's Proserpine, at once a mother and goddess of desire whose "head" is now "hidden" in death, in a "Pale" garden where "no leaf blooms or blushes." Lawrence's poem, like Swinburne's, is founded upon a structure of diametrical opposition: there are two women representing two kinds of love, one available but unmeaningful, the other, maternal one "Clothed round with . . . desire" but out of present reach. The speakers of both poems, caught between an unrecallable past and an unfulfilling present, live in memory. Each of them, consequently, tends to see life as a flow from origins towards death.

There are still more parallels to be drawn. In Swinburne's hymn, "love is sweet for a day" but soon "grows bitter"; Lawrence says of his bliss on the "threshing floor," "Ah, it was sweet," but soon he thinks of his "first beloved/Lovemaking" and remembers that it soon became a "bitter-sweet/Heart-aching." Lawrence completes the symbolism Swinburne began by associating his minimally loved country lass with wheat (she's an "armful of wheat") and even with the "bread" of Christ's body ("was broken/For me"). (Swinburne had associated his most dearly loved mother with "green grapes" in order to contrast her with Christ, from whose blood the "Sweet . . . wine" of mercy and sacrifice is made.) The important thing for the reader to be aware of, however, is not the number of echoes,

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parallels, and debts but, rather, the reason for their existence. Lawrence intends to discuss, poetically, the situation of being torn between two sensibilities, two visions of things (*Look! We Have Come Through*, as its title indicates, is a volume about the arduous struggle for emergence, spiritual and aesthetic). Swinburne, in his Proserpine poems, gave him a poetic system with which to do so. Through appropriation of Swinburne's poetic structure Lawrence can make the following claim through an unstated but powerful analogy: mere sexual experience with a "ripe" country lass at a "Christmas dance" is, for him, for the moment, as pale, grey, empty—even barren—as the living cult of the Galilean, Christ, was to the speaker of Swinburne's hymn, raised in adoration of a beautiful old goddess whose time has passed, nurtured in a world that now lies dead and buried.

Swinburne thus provides Lawrence with a poetic model for talking about his own inability to emerge fully from adolescence into adulthood, from an old sensibility into a new one. Swinburne is not, however, the only Victorian to inform Lawrence's "Hymn." Indeed, Thomas Hardy's very different kind of poetry, which in many ways proves the more challenging source of inspiration for Lawrence, must be faced off against or even married to the Swinburnian strain of Victorian lyric if Lawrence is to come through, if he is to generate the much-needed new *ethos*.

The scene (and the earthy, erotic world of being it represents) that Lawrence suddenly drops in stanza five of the "Hymn to Priapus" and thus leaves curiously unfulfilled and incomplete is one that can be found energetically set forth in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. In that novel, Hardy describes a barn dance attended by villagers and farmhands of the Trantridge region:

> Through this floating fusty *debris* of peat and hay, mixed with the perspirations and warmth of the dancers, and forming together a sort of vegeto-human pollen, the muted fiddles feebly pushed their notes, in marked contrast to the spirit with which the measure was trodden out. They coughed as they danced, and laughed as they coughed. Of the rushing couples there could barely be discerned more than the high lights—the indistinctness shaping them to satyrs chasing nymphs—a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes; Lotis attempting to elude Priapus, and always failing.[4]

[4] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Chapter 10.

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The passage from *Tess*, certainly, is enough to suggest that Hardy was the first-comer to the world of the barn and to its sensual, country Lotises, that Lawrence is thus a son with a juvenile passion for something that isn't his. If Hardy is the "Priapus" that never "fails" in his rustic relations, a procreative force in a primeval world, then Lawrence, as a second-generation barnyard guest, proves to be something of an Oedipal "dancer." The "country lass" and the dead mother are thus, in a horrible sense, psychologically inseparable, a fact which may suggest that Lawrence suspects here, even more fearfully than in later works that all his attempts at new creation begin in incest, that the words and things out of which he would attempt to bring or make something original are always his own parents.

The passage from *Tess*, however, is not the most convincing, let alone the exclusive, evidence of Hardy's most powerful precedence. In the process of examining all the Swinburnian images, myths, and diametrical patterns present in Lawrence's poem, we may have felt that the "Hymn to Priapus" doesn't look or sound or feel very much like Swinburne. Take a stanza like

> Something in me remembers
> And will not forget.
> The stream of my life in darkness
> Deathward set!

This sounds somewhat less like Swinburne's

> Thou art more than the day or the morrow, the
> seasons that laugh or that weep;
> For these give joy and sorrow; but thou, Proserpine,
> sleep

than like one "Ditty" by Thomas Hardy—

> Upon that fabric fair
> "Here is she!"
> Seems written everywhere
> Unto me!

or another:

> And we were left alone
> As Love's own pair;
> Yet never the love-light shown
> Between us there!
> .....

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Face unto face, then, say,
Eyes my own meeting,
Is your heart far away,
Or with mine beating?
. . . . . .
Yet, Dear, though one may sigh,
Raking up leaves,
New leaves will dance on high—
Earth never grieves! [5]

On closer inspection, we find that what Lawrence has in fact done is to compromise the very regular, anapestic hexameter couplets of Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" with Hardy's looser stanza form. If we rewrite the following ABAB quatrain from Lawrence's "Hymn to Priapus,"

He can add the reckoning up
I suppose, between now and then,
Having walked himself in the thorny, difficult
Ways of men,

in the form of a rhyming couplet, the secondary presence of Swinburne begins to be noticeable:

He căn ădd thĕ rĕckŏnĭng ŭp I sŭppŏsĕ, bĕtwĕĕn nŏw ănd thĕn,
Hăvĭng walkĕd hĭmsĕlf ĭn thĕ thŏrnў, dĭfficŭlt wăys ŏf mĕn.

Swinburne's presence, nonetheless, remains secondary, not just because it is only felt when Lawrence's lines are so altered but also because it is the meaning and implications of Hardy's art—not his rhythms—that preoccupy the later poet in the "Hymn to Priapus." One of Hardy's *Wessex Poems* that Lawrence no doubt knew well, "The Dance at the Phoenix," tells the tale of a woman whose girlhood "had hardly been/A life of modesty"; by sixteen she had known half the "troopers of/The King's-Own Cavalry." At age sixty, lying in bed next to the sleeping husband to whom she has always been faithful, she hears some soldiers making merry at "The Phoenix Inn." "'Alas for chastened thoughts!'" she says, and soon she has left the house, her "springtide blood" aflow. Hardy describes her ensuing night of "unchastening," her re-entry into the life of her youth (like a

[5] The four Hardy poems from which I quote are: "Ditty," "At an Inn," "Between Us Now," and "Autumn in King Hintock's Park."

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Lawrentian Phoenix rising from its ashes even as it dies), through the metaphor of "dancing." She "soared and swooped" until the

> chime went four,
> When Jenny, bosom-beating, rose
> To seek her silent door.

Because such moments of ecstasy have no place in what we deem mature life, because the social repercussions that will inevitably follow such a night's revelry would end the old woman's life as she has come to know it, morning finds Jenny dead.

Hardy published a number of other poems about "dancing," most of them in the same volume, *Time's Laughingstocks*, in 1909 (the year of Swinburne's death and three years before Lawrence composed his "Hymn"). "The Night of the Dance" describes a man's anticipation of festivities to come in an old "thatch" barn where "sparrows flit" and "owls . . . whoo from the gable[s]." He seems to sense that "Sweet scenes are impending here" (Lawrence will later say "Ah, it was sweet!") and "That She will return" his vows tonight in "Love's low tongue." As the speaker thinks these amorous thoughts and awaits the anticipated hour, it would seem, he thinks, that "The cold moon . . . centers its gaze on me." Like the "star" that "witness[es]" Lawrence's doings and thoughts,

> The stars, like eyes in reveries,
> Their westering as for a while forborne,
> Quiz downward curiously.

"After the Club Dance," another and perhaps the most important influence on the "Hymn to Priapus" that can be found in Hardy's 1909 volume, is the narrative of a woman walking home alone from a rural dance. There she, like the "soft country lass" of Lawrence's poem, has "been broken" for some fellow. And he, it now seems, blames her for allowing him the pleasure he himself sought:

> Black'on frowns east on Maidon
> And westward to the sea,
> But on neither is his frown laden
> With scorn, as his frown on me!
>
> At dawn my heart grew heavy,
> I could not sip the wine,
> I left the jocund bevy
> And that young man o'mine.

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The roadside elms pass by me—
Why do I sink with shame
When the birds a-perch there eye me?
They too have done the same!

The poet delivers his ironic commentary indirectly through the confused mind of the girl. She is an "innocent" in the way that Tess Durbeyfield is, for Hardy, "A Pure Woman." She knows—or *thinks* she knows—her indulgences to be perfectly natural. What is more, she knows her "young man" has "done the same" as she. She cannot understand why pleasure should turn to "scorn" and why her spirits, recently high, should now have to "sink with shame." Whether or not the last, exclamatory line of the poem is a triumph for the speaker is not clear. But the poet's triumph is: Hardy's ironic structure celebrates natural energies and scorns those perverse laws of society which would always identify as corrupt their manifestation.

Thus, although several poems by Hardy together with Swinburne's Proserpine poems can be seen providing some of the poetic building blocks of Lawrence's "Hymn," Hardy is far more to the poem than a way of expressing, analyzing, and coming to terms with life, an artistic problem, or both. He is, rather, the reason why terms need to be come to. In generating a sensibility, a world-view, he generated the crisis Lawrence's poem depicts, responds to, and in a sense *is*. That sensibility—an appreciation for the sensual, for the quick throb of the physical in everything—is one that Lawrence is greatly compelled by: this much we know from his criticism of Shelley, who, according to Lawrence was primarily a bloodless, bodiless abstraction.[6] What we see in the "Hymn to Priapus," however, is that Lawrence fears that he, himself, may be something of an old-fashioned, asensual abstraction. How, then, is Lawrence to continue the work that Hardy began? How is *he* to develop Hardy?

Hardy's poem about the old woman who thrills to "The Dance at the Phoenix," like Lawrence's "Hymn to Priapus," relates the dances of sex and death. But where Lawrence's poem is threatened by morbidity, Hardy's is witty and satiric. The "death" of Jenny, after all, cleverly signifies on the one hand a renewed, orgasmic intensity of life and, on the other, the killing guilt which society instills.

[6] D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, collected in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward McDonald (New York: Viking, 1946), p. 459.

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Hardy's Jenny, like the speaker of Lawrence's poem, might seem to want to revivify a dead past, but the important difference is this: whereas Jenny's search for a dead past becomes an intensely living present, Lawrence's plunges him into gloomy thoughts of a love lost to time. The treatment of incest in Lawrence's poem is reminiscent of Hardy's somewhat quieter exploration, and again the predecessor manages a brighter tone. At "The Dance at the Phoenix," young men dance in high spirits and reckless abandon with a woman their "fathers" once "knew," a woman old enough to be their mother. At Lawrence's Christmas dance, the poet's subliminal recognition that his dance follows the same steps that his father's did (whether or not one accepts the suggestion that Lawrence has been the guest of a barn and a girl to whom Hardy was the original "Priapus") causes him to drown his poem in guilt and self-consciousness unknown to Hardy's more ebullient ballad.

Or take "The Night of the Dance." Hardy's ballad is excited, optimistic, poetic foreplay to the "sweet scene" to come, the dance in which "She will return" the speaker's love in "Love's low tongue." (Even the "gaz[ing]" moon and "quiz[zing]" stars reflect the protagonist's present "curious[ity]," not doubts or questions about the past or the future). Lawrence, by positioning a poem seven or eight hours in time after the setting of the poem Hardy had published some three years earlier, opts for a post-climatic scenario that betrays his lack of optimism, his mixed feelings, about both the sensual dance and the sensual poetry he would enjoy.

In the "Hymn to Priapus," then, Lawrence would seem at once to repress and indulge a fear. The fear is that rather than proving his own poetic viability by recalling and developing poetic history, he takes one step forward only to fall two steps back to the position of Swinburne, whose "new words" were responsible for pointing Hardy (by Hardy's own admission) on the way of his own poetic quest.[7] Is the fear, however, fully justified? It seems so only if we compare Lawrence's "Hymn" to Hardy's poems about dancing. If we compare it to any of the number of poems about dead or dying mothers that

[7] Thomas Hardy, in his elegy entitled "A Singer Asleep," refers to Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* as "New words, in classic guise." Hardy's various testimonies to Swinburne's influence can be found in my study of *Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence, and the Burden of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

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Hardy had published in the dozen years before Lawrence began writing the "Hymn to Priapus," however, a very different answer emerges.

Writing some fifty years after Wordsworth's *Prelude* had made the mother into a symbol of a vastly meaningful and morally nourishing world, Hardy gives voice to a mother who regrets that man ever dreamed of a Nature so vastly meaningful and beneficent.[8] He gives voice to a Nature, in other words, which regrets that she was ever conceived as a mother who could speak to, irradiate, exalt man and his moral sense. She deplores the fact that for years man insisted on seeing her "sun as a Sanct-shape," her "moon as the Night-queen," her "stars as august and sublime." His "mountings of mindsight," the "range of his vision," now reach so high that, the saddened mother laments, man only "finds blemish/Throughout my domain." So, she declares,

> Let me grow, then, but mildews and mandrakes,
> And slimy distortions,
> Let nevermore things good and lovely
> To me appertain.

Hardy's poem, entitled "The Mother Mourns," describes a fictional mother dying, a man-projected mother who was thought to reflect man's highest hopes and most fanciful dreams, a "Nature" who was once for more than just some "country lass" to be "broken" for man but who is now as carelessly used as she once was revered and exalted. ("My species are dwindling," Hardy's mother protests before she lapses into silense; "my forests are barren," my "leopardine beauties are rarer/My tusky ones vanish.")

In coming to a Hardy piece like "The Mother Mourns" from a poem such as the "Hymn to Priapus," we suddenly become dissatisfied enough with the literary anxiety that permeates one level of Lawrence's work to look beyond it and discover a deeper level of significance. Anyone, after Lawrence, who considers carefully the Hardyan "Mother," whether specifically in this particular poem or generally in any one of the elder author's many lyrics treating once-worshiped deities or ideals, can't help feeling it an oversimplification to state that Hardy's attitude towards the mothering past is that it is mordant and that we are well-rid of it and its fictions. The more we look at a lyric like "The Mother Mourns" the more we decide that its sensibility is

[8] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book II, ll. 233-41.

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more deeply ambivalent than Lawrence's own. After all, Lawrence speaks in his own voice and admits, though he laments, the passing of a maternal sensibility. But doesn't Hardy, by letting his "Mother" deliver her own lament and sing her own swan song, put himself in a terribly compromised position? Although he admits that his mother may speak no divine messages, he will not give up on the idea that she may still speak to man. Although he lets his mother confess that man's mind far eclipses nature's dumb indifference, he also gives her the tone of a miffed deity critical of man, an insulted goddess who will write on the tablets of an inspired poet.

Lawrence, by remembering Thomas Hardy and protesting, implicitly, his own insufficiency in a work like the "Hymn to Priapus," sends us into the texts of the precursor with a particular point of view that allows or causes us to see them in a new light. Thinking of Lawrence's own predicament, we are led to realize that his forerunner's lyrics turn from and yet, in the last analysis, sneak back towards an old romantic sensibility considerably more quickly (if considerably less obviously) than do Lawrence's own. The "anxiety" of a poem such as the "Hymn to Priapus" thus unmakes itself by positing the Hardyan source. As it does so it propels us into a whole new awareness of Thomas Hardy's world-view, Lawrence's interreactions with it, and the nature of the emerging—and emergent—results.

I have spoken of Hardy's "Mother" poems as if they were the point at which Lawrence jolts us into a critical re-assessment of Hardy's sensibility. My choice is, of course, arbitrary. Another reader might first experience a revisionary recollection during contemplation of some of the images and terms that are absent in Lawrence's poem but that are to be found in Hardy's description of the barnyard dance in *Tess*, namely, *débris*, vegeto-human, trodden, coughing, indistinctness, and failing. Still another might become aware of *these* images after first being made aware, by the authorial-philosophical perspective of the "Hymn to Priapus," of the total absence of such a viewpoint in "After the Club Dance," the poem in which a young girl asks why she should feel guilty for having indulged in an activity that all Nature takes delight in. Does Hardy's artistic decision to present no more than a young girl's half-guilty questions derive from his own strong convictions of her innocence? Or does his reluctance to speak a line in his own voice grow out of a simultaneous willingness and

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inability fully to leave behind the punitive values of the age that bore him?

The significant fact about Lawrence's poem, then, has little to do with whether the doubts it may raise about Hardy stem primarily from its differences with one old "dancing" passage or another. It has little to do with whether the view Lawrence affords us of Hardy's living Romantic "Mother" causes, is caused by, or is simultaneous with the questions we may find ourselves raising about the depths of Hardy's earthly sensuality. The important revelation made by the "Hymn to Priapus," rather, is that its author's failure to extend the path Hardy began to cut is not due to any lack of artistic power or modern spirit. The most profound cause of Lawrence's retreat from the Hardyan sensibility (and the attitude towards the sexual partner it might entail), rather, is the critical assessment of that sensibility by the more modern poet's central self, the poet's act of understanding that although in Hardy there are developable elements of a modern sensibility, the Hardyan sensibility as it stands is not the way of the future. Lawrence has sensed that to make sexual encounter into a more simple, natural indulgence than it has been, or to imply that but for Christian society and its muddle-headed ideas the Tess Durbeyfields of the world should have no serious misgivings about what happens in barns or under the darkness of the primeval trees, may be to bring more Priapan enjoyment into a Victorian world but it is *not* to offer a new world-view. To intimate that the coming together of a man and a woman is analogous to a madcap dance at the Phoenix or a tying up of the garter before "jog[ging] on again" down "Crimmercrock lane" (which is what Hardy makes it in a poem called "The Dark-Eyed Gentleman"), even to suggest that it is or should be "the same" as what "the birds a-perch" in the "roadside elms . . . have" so often "done," is not to revise drastically the prevailing education. It is, rather, to offer but another version of the old, old story which holds that the earthy, sensual life is not a thing to be valued or prized. Far from being the locus of divine mystery, it is, quite the contrary, just about as common as it can be. Lawrence walks away from his casual sexual encounter with a Hardyan subject to return, in thought, to an absent mother. He does so not because the encounter was sexual but, rather, because it was casual. Put another way, the poet ends up in a dark no-man's-land that is outside two realms—the realm of the barn and the realm of the dead—because something in him has managed

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to make a connection between the two. Speaking of the "anxious" level of the "Hymn to Priapus," I said that Lawrence connects the living lass with the dead mother because if his fear as a poet that, in the words of Hardy's "Dance at the Phoenix," the world in which he "dances" is a world his "father knew." At the deeper level of discourse the same connection is inevitably made, but its meaning is different. Lawrence mentally connects the two women because something in him senses that the image of a discardable reality is the look that old ideals project from just beyond the grave.

In his *Study of Thomas Hardy*, Lawrence suggests that Hardy began the development of a wonderful, residual, primitive strain of sensuality that existed in Shelley but that Shelley repressed almost out of his poems. Speaking of Shelley's poem "To a Skyark," Lawrence says that although "Shelley wishes to say" that "the skylark is pure, untrammeled spirit," the line "Bird thou never wert," together with the very regular metrics and rhyme scheme of the poem, suggest that the romantic predecessor knows "that the skylark *is* in fact a bird" and that birds *are*, in fact, "concrete, momentary thing[s]."[9] If we think of Hardy's poem entitled "Shelley's Skylark," a lyric in which the recycled organic remains of the bird that Shelley never even saw is pictured "throb[bing] in the myrtle green," we can hear that primitive strain in Hardy that Hardy had heard in Shelley and amplified. That strain, in turn, is recombined by Lawrence with the strain of spirituality that had stood opposed, in Shelley, to the world of earthly sensuality and that Hardy had sought to reject for reasons of its opposition. Beginning with the basic rhetorical model of Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine," which allows the poet to position himself between half-tenable philosophies (the Christianity available is far less attractive than the Hellenism that is not), Lawrence emerges from the Victorian's situation of self-division with what he hopes will be a new poetics of living. Starting with an almost indeterminate act of self-criticism, he ends up recalling from destructive eminence two dreams that amount to what Hardy might call "twin halves of one... august event"—Shelley's spiritual love and Hardy's demystified (or casual) sex.[10] What he will be left with, when the work is complete, is a new creation presided over by a new, quasi-Greek, Sex-God or Priapus.

[9] D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, *op. cit.*, p. 459.
[10] Thomas Hardy, "The Convergence of the Twain," l. 30.

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The arrival at this level of understanding allows us to make sense both of the conclusion and the title of Lawrence's poem. When it is seen solely as the work of a poet obsessed with influence anxiety, the "Hymn to Priapus" makes us wonder just how it is that "Desire comes up, and contentment," makes us wholly unsatisfied by the answer Lawrence provides to the last question he poses:

> How is it I grin then, and chuckle
> Over despair?
>
> Grief, grief, I suppose and sufficient
> Grief makes us free
> To be faithless and faithful together
> As we have to be.

As the statement of a poet, however, who by having been "faithless and faithful together" to the several influences of his past is emerging from a double sense of dissatisfaction into a unified sense of contentment-in-liberty, the last stanza makes sense enough. And whereas the penultimate stanza is still self-conscious and introspective in the way that all the previous ones have been ("how much do I care?/How do I grin...?"), the final quatrain has a steady, relaxed, matured, conversational tone ("Grief, grief, I suppose... makes us free"). The change in sound may not imply that an interlocutor has come on the scene, but it does seem to suggest that the speaker now might be ready for one.

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PAUL B. ARMSTRONG*

The Epistemology of "The Good Soldier": A Phenomenological Reconsideration

> "We live forward, but we understand backward."
> —Søren Kierkegaard
>
> "Knowledge, . . . the most natural thing in the world, suddenly emerges as a mystery."
> —Edmund Husserl
>
> "The breach from one mind to another is perhaps the greatest breach in nature."
> —William James

Many readers have recognized that *The Good Soldier* is a novel about how Dowell knows and that its manner of narration reflects Ford Madox Ford's fascination with the limits and range of consciousness. Samuel Hynes's essay on "The Epistemology of *The Good Soldier*" is the classic statement about knowing in Ford's novel:

> [Dowell] is a limited, fallible man, but the novel is not a study of his particular limitations; it is rather a study of the difficulties which man's nature and the world's put in the way of his will to know. Absolute truth and objective judgment are not possible; experience is a darkness, and other hearts are closed to us. If man nevertheless desires to know, and he does, then he will have to do the best he can with the shabby equipment which life offers him, and to be content with small and tentative achievements.[1]

In my three epigraphs from leading phenomenological thinkers, however, I have suggested a way of more accurately marking out the major areas of knowing which Ford's novel explores. Kierkegaard refers to our propensity for bewilderment as the forward press of events outstrips the backward glance of understanding. The "mys-

* Paul Armstrong is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Virginia. He has completed a book entitled *Henry James: A Phenomenological Perspective.*

[1] Samuel Hynes, "The Epistemology of *The Good Soldier*," *Sewanee Review*, 69 (1961), 230. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically.

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tery" of "knowledge," in Husserl's words, emerges for Dowell when he awakens from his attitude of taking things for granted without regard for the limits to perception. Dowell then shows that these limits can be converted into possibilities for understanding through reflection and speculation. William James alludes to the problems others pose for the self—problems which Dowell discovers when Leonora's surprising revelations help him overcome his longstanding naivete about personal relations. We shall study Dowell's story in these three areas of knowing so that we might then examine the epistemology of reading and representation in *The Good Soldier*.[2]

I

According to Hynes, the action of the novel is "the action of the narrator's mind as it gropes for the meaning, the reality of what has occurred"; consequently, "the real events of the novel are Dowell's thoughts about what has happened, and not the happenings themselves" (pp. 226, 230-31). For this reason, as Dowell explains, he tells his story "in a very rambling way so that it may be difficult for anyone to find his path through what may be a sort of maze.... when one discusses an affair—a long, sad affair—one goes back, one goes forward."[3] Dowell's narration goes back and forth across his past because he has undertaken to reflect on his unreflective experience.[4] His story traverses two kinds of intentionality: our original experience with the world and the work of self-consciousness to understand what we first lived through uncritically, with a good deal of obscurity and ambiguity. Through Dowell, Ford explores how acts of reflection aim at a prior fund of experience which they seek to clarify.[5] But Hynes is some-

[2] I am grateful to Professors Roger Shattuck, Thomas C. Moser, and Darryl J. Gless for advice about an early draft of this essay.

[3] Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion* (New York: Vintage, 1951), p. 183. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically.

[4] It may seem inaccurate to claim that Dowell reflects on his own experience, since he devotes so much of his story to past events in which he had no part. As we shall see, though, these events do belong to his experience inasmuch as they make up the hidden sides of his relations with Florence, the Ashburnhams, and Nancy. For example, why the Ashburnhams were not simply "quite good people" (p. 4), why Florence died, why Nancy went mad—all of these problems are aspects of his experience which demand that he reconstruct hidden sides not immediately available to him in order to understand what happened to him.

[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty discusses the "unreflected" and "reflection" in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and

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what misleading when he says Dowell "gropes for the meaning, the reality of what has occurred." In his rambling reflections, Dowell does not search for the meaning of what at first had none; rather, he discovers a world of meanings already there in his unreflective experience—but meanings which may be ambiguous, obscure, or erroneous because he never stopped to clarify and criticize them. Again and again, Dowell says: "At the time I thought that" such was the case, "But I can figure out now" that this original conferral of meaning wasn't adequate (p. 198). As the drama of a consciousness examining its history, Dowell's story is not exclusively devoted to either his current thoughts or his past experience. Dowell's narration brings together both his unreflective experience and his self-conscious reflections. The action of his novel is the interaction of these two levels of intentionality.

Dowell's narration seems to ramble because confusion frequently marked his unreflective experience and because his reflections only gradually and tentatively close the gap between what he lived and what he understands. "Well, those are my impressions," he declares after recounting his confusion when Florence died; "What had actually happened had been this. I pieced it together afterwards" (p. 109). His original "impressions" have the ambiguity and obscurity of unreflecting meaning-creation. Only retrospective acts of self-consciousness sort them out and organize them coherently. Ford's oft-quoted description of "literary impressionism" elevates this relation between reflection and the unreflected into an aesthetic principle. According to Ford, he and Conrad "saw that Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render impressions." [6] To "render impressions" means to recreate the level of original experience before reflection composes life into a clear, orderly narration.

Dowell often despairs at his ability to translate his "impressions" into coherent, self-conscious understanding. "I don't know, I don't know," he laments near the beginning; "It is all a darkness" (pp. 9, 12).

Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. x-xi, xviii. Also see Edmund Husserl on "active and passive genesis" in *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 77-81.

[6] Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1924), pp. 194-95.

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Dowell's lament points out the excess of the unreflected over the reflected—an excess which is one of his first discoveries. The unreflected always enjoys a surplus over the reflected from the moment we begin to appropriate the lived into understanding.[7] Mark Schorer says of Dowell: "This is a mind not quite in balance" (p. x). And he is correct to the extent that Dowell is never quite one with himself because of the limits to what he masters through reflection. These limits give legitimacy to Freudian critics of the novel who demystify his self-deceptions about sexual desire. As they argue, this virgin cuckold never does understand the fascination and fear about his own desires and those of Edward, Leonora, Florence, and Nancy which his narration betrays.[8] But Dowell does at least know that an inadequately reflected aspect of himself sometimes causes him to behave in ways he doesn't understand: "It is as if one had a dual personality, the one I being entirely unconscious of the other" (p. 103). Psychoanalysis attempts to resolve this duality through reflection. As a kind of training in self-consciousness, psychoanalysis brings into the light of understanding the dark unconscious forces which dispossess consciousness of its control over itself.[9] The dispute over Dowell's reliability is at least in part an argument over whether to focus attention on the role of the unreflected or reflection in his story. Dowell does not make the darkness of his original experience totally transparent. But he does extend the reach of his reflective self in order to bring clarity to areas of his experience where opacity had reigned unchallenged before.

Dowell extends his understanding by writing. Speech and writing

[7] I am paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty: "the lived is... never entirely comprehensible, what I understand never quite tallies with my living experience, in short, I am never quite at one with myself" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 347).

[8] For example, see Thomas C. Moser, "Towards *The Good Soldier*—Discovery of a Sexual Theme," *Daedalus*, 92 (1963), 312-25, and Carol Ohmann, *Ford Madox Ford: From Apprentice to Craftsman* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 71-111. Unlike Ohmann, however, Moser understands that Dowell can be self-deceived about sexual desire but still retain reliability as a narrator. We shall return to Dowell's ambivalence about desire when we turn to the relation between self and other.

[9] On the relation between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, see Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), particularly pp. 375-418.

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allow us to communicate, but language also enables us to present ourselves with our unreflected thoughts and feelings. Dowell repeatedly calls attention to his activity as the author of his text: "you must remember that I have been writing away at this story now for six months and reflecting longer and longer upon these affairs" (p. 184). We must remember the actual act of expression as a crucial dramatic element in Dowell's story because to write—or, even more vividly, to speak as he imagines he does "in a country cottage with a silent listener" (p. 183)—is to make the self present to itself by presenting it to others. "This is the saddest story I have ever heard" (p. 3), Dowell claims as he begins his tale. As we learn later, Dowell has "heard" much of the story he tells from informants like Leonora and Edward. Even more, though, Dowell "hears" his own story for the first time as he tells it. Dowell only discovers what he thinks and what his history means by offering his experience to himself in language. As we have seen, his unreflective experience already had meaning—but latent meaning which awaits explanation in words so that it can be examined.[10]

As he educates himself by writing, Dowell advances not only his understanding of himself and others but also his ability to express his new awareness. In the first few pages of the novel, Dowell shifts ground often—offering an assessment only to withdraw or reverse it, moving unpredictably from topic to topic, interrupting lines of development just as they get going, jumping unexpectedly from one level of discourse to another (from reporting past events to judging himself and others to philosophizing about the human condition). These pages lead some readers to join Frank Kermode in calling Dowell's narration "deceptive" and "misleading."[11] But toward the end of the novel, Dowell shows himself much more able to focus his attention and organize events than he was at the start. For example, his gripping account of the impassioned and maddeningly labyrinthine entanglement of Leonora, Edward, and Nancy during their last days at Branshaw Teleragh has much more concentration, penetration, and

[10] As Merleau-Ponty suggests, "the thinking subject himself is in a kind of ignorance of his thoughts so long as he has not formulated them for himself, or even spoken and written them" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 177; also see pp. 337, 401-04).

[11] Frank Kermode, "Novels: Recognition and Deception," *Critical Inquiry*, 1 (1974), 108.

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narrative control than Dowell could muster when he began his story. "Is all this digression or isn't it digression?" Dowell asks near the beginning; "Again I don't know" (p. 14). But after much reflection on the unreflected, Dowell gains enough sophistication about meaning and expression to evaluate his narrative strategy self-consciously. Acknowledging that he hasn't kept the time-line of his story strictly chronological, Dowell explains:

> I cannot help it. It is so difficult to keep all these people going. I tell you about Leonora and bring her up to date; then about Edward, who has fallen behind. And then the girl gets hopelessly left behind. I wish I could put it down in diary form. (p. 222)

And then he reorients the reader by providing a brief chronology. Dowell's bewilderment earlier about whether or not he was digressing differs from his resigned if disappointed awareness here about what he loses by choosing one way of organizing his story rather than another. His ability to orient the reader chronologically differs from his disorienting shifts at the outset. His grasp of alternative forms of narration differs from his frantic grasping about in the early pages for a way to tell his story.

A rigidly chronological format would not be appropriate, in fact, since it would ignore the temporal dynamics of self-consciousness. The relation between present and past in Dowell's way of telling his story shows that reflection is a process of remembering.[12] At one point, Dowell pauses to remark: "looking over what I have written, I see that I have unintentionally misled you when I said that Florence was never out of my sight. Yet that was the impression that I really had until just now. When I come to think of it she was out of my sight most of the time" (p. 88). This passage contains in miniature the

[12] This is one of the epistemological foundations of what has come to be known as the "time shift" in Ford's novel and in literary impressionism—what Arthur Mizener calls "the double perspective of the novel, the simultaneous awareness of what the experience was like for a participant as it was actually occurring and of what the full knowledge of hindsight shows it to have been" (*The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford* [New York and Cleveland: World, 1971], p. 268). As we shall see, though, what Mizener describes as a static, relatively straightforward juxtaposition is actually a dynamic, developing process of discovery which covers, as Robie Macauley notes, "all the tenses of memory" ("The Good Ford," *Kenyon Review*, 11 [1949], 272).

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temporal structure of the novel. Dowell recounts his original "impression" and then corrects it retrospectively. He gives the past as he understood it and the present in which he reconsiders this unreflected understanding. Dowell's discovery about Florence here invokes not only the distant past of their relation but also the more immediate past of his writing. From the perspective of the narrative present, Dowell looks back to the past of his original experience across the horizon of what he has just written. His past acts of reflection have given him a better situation for understanding, just as his new knowledge of Florence projects the possibility of future enlightenment as his narrative proceeds. Dowell changes his views of Florence (from a "poor dear" [p. 13] to a villainous meddler), of Leonora (from a noble sufferer to a deceitful destroyer), and of Edward (from "a raging stallion" [p. 12] to a misunderstood and misplaced sentimentalist). These changes are the consequence of many factors. But not the least of these factors is that Dowell's memory changes as it views the past from the ever-changing temporal perspective of the present.[13]

As the temporal structure of *The Good Soldier* shows, time makes reflection possible because the passing of moments allows the self in the present to relate itself to the self of the past. This temporal reduplication of consciousness is at the heart of Dowell's growing self-consciousness. But time also frustrates reflection, since the past always stands at a distance from the present. Dowell cannot relive his past; he can only try to remember it. The distance between past and present allows error in memory. But an infallible, unchanging memory would give Dowell a kind of omniscience. And an omniscient Dowell would not need to struggle to illuminate the darkness of the unreflected with the light of reflection.

II

The Good Soldier is, Hynes argues, "a narrative which raises uncertainty about the nature of truth and reality to the level of a structural principle" (p. 226). The uncertainty which plagues Dowell owes less to the limits of his memory than to the limits of perception he suddenly

[13] As Husserl points out, "memory is in a continuous flux because conscious life is in constant flux" (*The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1964], p. 77). Also see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 410-33.

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discovers when his unquestioning faith in his world collapses. Dowell had believed that he, his wife, and the Ashburnhams lived in "an extraordinarily safe castle" (p. 6). His attitude was one of "taking everything for granted" (p. 34)—so much so that he never recognized that he was pinning his faith on a world. When Dowell's unsuspecting faith is shattered, he reverts to almost nihilistic despair: "what does one know and why is one here?" (p. 10), he asks; "there is nothing to guide us" (p. 12). Dowell finds his world made strange to him, just as Nancy Rufford finds her world unsettled when all that she takes for granted about the sacredness of marriage is shown to be naive, untrustworthy belief. As he reflects on the surprises which at first confounded him, Dowell comes to understand the limits to perception and the dangers of belief. Dowell remains uncertain at the end: "I don't know. I know nothing. I am very tired" (p. 245). Dowell knows more than he suggests here, but his new awareness could not develop until his blind engagement with the world collapsed.

The many surprises which overtake Dowell show him how much he had unwittingly projected beliefs which misconstrued hidden sides. The sides he saw led him to believe that he, Florence, and the Ashburnhams danced a graceful "minuet de la cour" (p. 6). But when the hidden sides behind this façade emerge, Dowell discovers "It wasn't a minuet that we stepped; it was a prison—a prison full of screaming hysterics" (p. 7). He believed that he "possessed a goodly apple," only to find out it was "rotten at the core" (p. 7). Still, he asks, "isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple?" (p. 7). Dowell's question suggests the extent to which what we regard as "true" depends on unspoken assumptions, hypotheses, beliefs. His "apple" was a hypothesis about hidden sides. Dowell's surprise about its rottenness reveals to him that he saw it in only a limited aspect, where he had believed he knew it completely. His surprise is like the surprise we feel when, after seeing three sides of what seems to be a cube, we discover later that the other three sides don't exist. Dowell had expected that the hidden sides of his apple would harmonize and agree with the sides he saw, just as we had believed that the rest of our cube would fulfill the promise of the aspect in which we saw it. Because of the limits to what anyone's perspective discloses, hypotheses are necessary for understanding. The role of belief in perception makes error possible, like Dowell's huge mistake about his relations with Florence and the Ashburnhams. But it also allows knowledge, as

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Dowell discovers when he ponders the prison he had misconstrued as a minuet.[14]

Dowell avoided disillusioning surprise for so long because he ignored anomalies which suggested that the sides beyond his perspective might not confirm his hypotheses. Dowell is inaccurate when he claims: "I had never the remotest glimpse, not the shadow of a suspicion, that there was anything wrong" (p. 69). For example, during Leonora's strange outburst when they visited the Protest, Dowell "was aware of something treacherous, something frightening, something evil in the day" (p. 44)—so much so that his fear for the safety of the castle he believed in put him in a daze for a moment. When he recovered, Dowell used Leonora's remark about her Irish Catholic background to assure himself nothing more was the matter than that she was extraordinarily sensitive about her religion. "It struck me, at the time," he remembers, "that there was an unusual, an almost threatening, hardness in her voice" (p. 68)—an anomalous intensity which gave a hint he chose to ignore about the horrible goings-on behind the foursome's pretended equanimity. Looking back as he reflects on the unreflected, Dowell sees this anomaly as a sign that Leonora was "trying to warn [him] that Florence was making eyes at her husband" (p. 184); but he also reflects that Leonora should have hinted more boldly: "She ought to have said: 'Your wife is a harlot who is going to be my husband's mistress....' That might have done the trick" (p. 191; original ellipses). Dowell's self-deprecating irony about the boldness of the hint he needed indicates that he now recognizes and regrets his earlier eagerness to believe and slowness to suspect his hypotheses. "In the action of the novel," according to Hynes, "doubt and the need to know are equally real, though they deny each other" (p. 230). Actually, even if doubt may frustrate his quest for knowledge, Dowell's awakening shows him that doubting and knowing also support each other. He learns that perception demands a dialectic of faith and suspicion—faith in order to reveal what is disguised from our perspective, but suspicion to criticize our hypotheses.

Two anomalies which Dowell can no longer ignore finally force him to suspect what he had believed. These anomalies are, of course, Leonora's offhand comments about Florence's suicide and her adulterous

[14] This paragraph draws on Husserl's theory of intentionality. See *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 44-46. Also see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 233, 277, 297, 329.

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affair with Edward. Edward's all-night confession prepared Dowell to learn from Leonora's revelations by showing him how the sides hidden from his perspective could diverge drastically from the sides he saw—in this case how "absolute, hopeless, dumb agony" could lie behind the pretended "spirit of peace" at Branshaw Teleragh (p. 20). It takes so much to wake Dowell up not only because of his remarkable naivete but also because of the tenacity with which belief can resist correction by avoiding disillusionment.[15]

Dowell reexamines his erroneous conjectures not to abandon hypothetical thinking but to project new beliefs. If his earlier conjectures misled him, he can still only discover the truth through hypotheses—including, for example, his speculations about how Florence must have felt when, before her death, she crept up on Edward and Nancy in the park and then ran into Bagshawe and Dowell in the hotel. Dowell's reflections are filled with phrases like: "I seem to gather that..." (p. 169), "So I figured it out that..." (p. 169), "I fancy that was how it was" (p. 172). The difference between these explicit conjectures and the unspoken hypotheses which misled him earlier is that now he knows what he is doing. His understanding of how his hypotheses went wrong enables Dowell to conjecture self-consciously (and therefore more reliably) about hidden sides.

After his awakening, Dowell becomes relatively adept in handling the limits and possibilities of consciousness. From ignorance that points of view may differ radically in what they disguise and reveal, Dowell progresses to considerable facility in reconstructing and appreciating different perspectives on what he seeks to know. As he remarks at one point, "I have explained everything... from the several points of view that were necessary—from Leonora's, from Edward's, and, to some extent, from my own. You have the facts for the trouble of finding them; you have the points of view as far as I could ascertain or put them" (p. 184). He also reconstructs Florence's and Nancy's perspectives from what Leonora and Edward tell him and from what he remembers. His desire to reconstruct these "several points of view" testifies to Dowell's new-found awareness that no observer enjoys a privileged position which embraces all the rest and thus displays the world in all its aspects. As he admits by listing Leonora's

[15] See Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 5-22.

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and Edward's perspectives in the same series with his own, Dowell's position as narrator is not privileged either. His shifting passions about the other characters and his at times bizarre prejudices (about Catholicism, for example) may disguise more than they reveal. But Dowell's concern with understanding the perspectives of others brings him closer than any other character to a position of observation privileged by its ability to include other points of view.

This position is strengthened by his epistemological humility: "there are many things that I cannot well make out, about which I cannot well question Leonora, or about which Edward did not tell me" (p. 139). If Dowell needs to speculate to construct other perspectives, he also knows the dangers of allowing his hypotheses to go too far beyond the limits of his position. He says of Leonora that "At times she imagined herself to see more than was warranted" (p. 178). She commits an error he wishes to avoid—an error responsible for many of his mistakes in the past when he failed to recognize the precarious provisionality of his beliefs about hidden sides. But if Dowell doesn't hesitate to admit at times that some "things are a little inscrutable" (p. 185), then this confession frees him to trust his other hypotheses with the assurance that they are "only conjecture, but I think the conjecture is pretty well justified" (p. 116).

I have been explaining how, as Hynes contends, *The Good Soldier* portrays "the development of the narrator toward some partial knowledge" through his confrontation with "the limits of human knowledge" (pp. 228, 235). But despite this claim for the possibility of "partial knowledge," Hynes somewhat confusingly argues that the novel displays "an irresolvable pluralism of truths, in a world that remains essentially dark" (p. 231). Dowell's reconstructions of Florence's, Leonora's, Edward's, Nancy's, and his own perspectives do show "truth" to be more pluralistic than he realized before his awakening. But it is a limited pluralism rather than an irresolvable relativism, since Dowell can and does employ various criteria of validation, even if their imperfections prevent absolute certainty about what he knows.

To begin with, Dowell's surprise at his many mistaken beliefs would not be possible in a completely relativistic world where all versions of the "truth" were equal. His unspoken hypotheses run afoul of the criterion of validation by harmony and agreement. Our beliefs are confirmed when they successfully predict how the sides we can't

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see will harmonize and agree with what we do see. But Dowell's search for better agreement between hidden and unhidden sides seems frustrated by the disharmony among the perspectives of the other characters in the novel. And Dowell cannot ultimately resolve the differences between these perspectives because the positions, temperaments, and beliefs which they embody differ inalterably. But these perspectives do agree despite their differences, at least to some extent. If they didn't, then Dowell's accounts of them would be no more than a random compilation of unrelated stories. As part of one story, "the several points of view" Dowell offers share some agreement about what they aim at beneath their disagreements, some identity which unites their differences as differences about the same state of affairs. By comparing and contrasting the perspectives of different observers, Dowell seeks validity through intersubjective agreement. He also employs this criterion when he reflects on his conversations with Leonora and Edward to amplify and confirm his understanding about the "truth" of the history they have all participated in, even if the divergences between their perspectives prevent a single, authoritative account from emerging.[16]

Dowell also appeals to intersubjectivity by imagining "a sympathetic soul opposite" him by "the fireplace of a country cottage" (p. 12). This imaginary construct should recall the passage from Novalis which Conrad chose as the epigraph for *Lord Jim*: "It is certain my conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it."[17] Since, as Dowell discovers, the limits of our perspectives threaten us with solipsism and error, we gain a validity which transcends the relativism of the self when we can convince others to share our understanding. Dowell appeals to his sympathetic listener to validate his account by assenting to it. But as Dowell complains to his imaginary auditor, "you are so silent. You don't tell me anything" (p. 14). In his isolation with poor mad Nancy Rufford at the end, Dowell reaches out for sympathy, understanding, and assistance through the device of a "silent listener" whose importance suggests the significance of compassion and agreement but whose absence declares them inaccessible. Ultimately, then, Dowell appeals to us as readers, as his silent listeners, to grant validity to his perceptions, conjectures,

[16] For more on criteria of validity in understanding, see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. xix-xx, 54, 297, 338.

[17] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), p. ix.

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and judgments by agreeing with them. And the debate among his readers about the reliability of his reflections shows that such intersubjective agreement is as elusive as it is crucial as a criterion of validation.

III

Perfect intersubjective agreement eludes Dowell because of the gap between the self and the other which separates him from his silent listener. The same gap lies behind all of the frustrated and frustrating relationships in this novel of thwarted care and impassioned conflict. "Who in this world knows anything of any other heart" (p. 155), Dowell laments; "I know nothing—nothing in the world—of the hearts of men" (p. 7). Dowell's awakening reveals to him the opacity of other men and women by showing him that what they are for others may not provide a reliable guide to what they are for themselves. He may reduce this opacity by acts of sympathy and understanding, but he can never render it completely transparent if only because he cannot know the experience of another except from the position of his own experience. Hynes sums up Dowell's discovery: "we can know only one consciousness—the one we are in. Other human beings are simply other events outside" (p. 226). But Hynes exaggerates. Dowell is not a solipsist. His anguish about his isolation shows that "other human beings" are not "simply other events outside" which have no special significance to his self-contained, self-referential consciousness. The gap between himself and others pains Dowell because he cares deeply about them. His pain testifies to the paradox of the alter ego—the paradox whereby both community and isolation characterize human relations. As Dowell discovers, this paradox also makes for both conflict and care in our relations with others; conflict exploits and widens the gap between selves, but care works toward closing it.[18]

[18] On "the paradox of the alter ego," see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. xii-xiii, 346-65. Merleau-Ponty seeks to resolve the dispute between Heidegger's view that "care" is the meaning of personal relations and Sartre's argument that "conflict" inevitably divides the self and the other. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 225-73; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1966), pp. 301-400.

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Where Dowell despairs over the gulf which separates people from each other, Florence revels in the opportunities that it gives her to engage in conflict. Her opacity to others enables Florence to lie, as she does in deceiving Dowell about her heart condition and her sexual affairs. Her lies depend on the solipsistic aspect of her relations with others. But they are also intersubjective acts. She can only manipulate her naive husband by knowing what he thinks and by making him think he knows her better than he does. Florence lies to gain the power which comes from being more knowing than known.[19] Hence her great concern with secrets which the opacity of the self ordinarily protects from the gaze of others. Florence gains power over Leonora when she happens upon her and Maisie Maidan in an embrassing position and thus becomes one of the few "who had any idea that the Ashburnhams were not just good people with nothing to their tails" (p. 66). Her knowledge of the Ashburnhams' secret infuriates Leonora because it gives Florence a claim to the ascendancy of a subject with greater freedom and power than those she knows as objects. Florence asserts this claim by giving advice which insists that she knows what is best for the Ashburnhams. But Leonora resists with mockery that asserts her own superiority as a knowing subject: "You come to me straight out of his bed to tell me that that is my proper place. I know it, thank you" (p. 71). If possessing secrets assures Florence of her ascendancy as a knower, then to become known by having her secrets revealed is a fate worse than death. Or at least she chooses death rather than life with Dowell in part because, more known than knowing throughout their marriage, he inadvertently penetrates one aspect of her opacity by learning her secret about Jimmy.

Unlike Florence, many characters in Ford's novel wish to show care—but only to find themselves enmeshed in conflict because of the breach between the self and others. At one time or another, and in one way or another, all of the major characters play the role of helper—Dowell the perpetual nursemaid, Florence in her pretended concern for the Ashburnhams' marriage, Nancy in her offer to sacrifice herself to Edward, Leonora through her efforts to save herself and her husband from financial ruin and permanent separation, and Edward not only in his sentimental desire to comfort the mournful but also in his feudal conception of his obligations to his tenants and his nation. More often than not, however, the help they give is either

[19] See Sartre on "the look of the Other" in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 340-400.

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ineffectual, misplaced, or positively harmful. Florence seeks to dominate in her solicitude for Edward and Leonora. At least at first, though Leonora wants to show genuine care for her husband's welfare. Yet she discovers, much to her disappointment and bewilderment, that he construes her help not as liberating but as dominating.[20] "Why, [Leonora] asked herself again and again, did none of the good deeds that she did for her husband ever come through to him, or appear to him as good deeds?" (p. 179). With his growing understanding of personal relations, Dowell answers her question: "in a way, she did him very well—but it was not his way" (p. 168). Leonora's "good deeds" fail because she does not understand the obstacle which the opacity of others places in the way of our ability to help them. Because their relation is plagued by constant mutual misunderstanding, what she assumes will please Edward invariably gives him pain. Where she feels that she is enhancing his life by supporting his altruistic projects, for example, or even by smoothing the way for his liaisons with other women, Edward understands her acts of care as signs of conflict since her intervention takes his freedom away from him. The destructive, purely dominating solicitude which, with Nancy as her innocent pawn, Leonora directs toward Edward at the end reflects her frustrating failure to find a way of helping him constructively. It is as if she decides to adopt a policy of killing by claiming to cure since her earlier attempts at curing had been felt as killing anyway.

Dowell's theory of love describes how the quest for intimacy seeks to release the self from the prison of its private consciousness. In a more resigned and insightful restatement of his early lament that nothing guides us, Dowell explains the despair which faces us when we recognize the limits of our private worlds: "We are all so afraid, we are all so alone, we all so need from the outside the assurance of our worthiness to exist" (p. 115). Dowell describes a man's "love affair, a love for any definite woman," as "something in the nature of a widening of the experience," an attempt "to walk beyond the horizon" of the private self in order "to get... behind those eyebrows with the peculiar turn, as if he desired to see the world with the eyes that they overshadow" (p. 114). Where the prison of the self threatens to trap us in a fearful isolation, we can attempt to

[20] Heidegger discusses "liberating" and "dominating" solicitude in *Being and Time*, pp. 158-60.

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expand and confirm our world, Dowell argues, by bridging the gap which separates it from other worlds.

But Dowell's skepticism about "the permanence of man's or woman's love" (pp. 113-14) acknowledges the limits to intersubjectivity which doom the quest for union to failure. Boredom concludes one affair and incites new ones, he explains, because "The pages of the book will become familiar; the beautiful corner of the road will have been turned too many times" (p. 115). Originally a liberation from the confines of the self, union with another becomes a new trap when familiarity diminishes the quester's sense of the otherness of the other. Knowing another's world only increases his awareness of the many worlds he doesn't know. The quester never achieves deliverance; there simply "comes at last a time of life when . . . [he] will travel over no more horizons; . . . He will have gone out of the business" (p. 115). The quester's final affair signals not the achievement of victorious communion but, rather, the ultimate intractibility of the divide which separates us from others.

At the end of the novel, Dowell has resolved the paradox of the alter ego in some ways but not in others. Part of his failure asserts our ultimate inability to resolve the paradox completely. But part of the ratio of Dowell's success and failure here is also related to the ratio between what he has mastered through reflection and what remains in the darkness of the unreflected. Consider, for example, Dowell's controversial claim: "I loved Edward Ashburnham—and . . . I love him because he was just myself" (p. 253). Dowell asserts the inter-subjective identity of one world with another which, in his view, love seeks. This claim is both valid and absurd in a contradiction which points the paradox of our relations with others. Hynes argues for its validity: "by an act of perfect sympathy [Dowell] has known what Ashburnham was" (p. 234). Retrospective acts of understanding have indeed brought Dowell closer to Edward in death than they were in life. But Edward is dead, and his absence puts a stark limit on any communion with him. Nor can we gloss over all of Ashburnham's qualities which Dowell admits he lacks—"the courage and the virility and possibly also the physique of Edward Ashburnham" (p. 253). All of these differences between them insist on the differences between two selves that stand in the way of the perfect union Dowell wishfully proclaims. His claim of identity with Edward also demands further reflection on sexual grounds. It shows a desire for sexual gratification—

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for "robbing the orchards" (p. 254), as Edward did—which Dowell imperfectly understands and perhaps seeks not to confront.

He has yet to reflect on the unreflected sufficiently, for example, to understand his reasons for suddenly declaring his intention to marry Nancy after Florence's death. He does not know how much of this wish, like his decision earlier to marry Florence, was mimetic desire. In both cases he formed his desire by imitating what others desired (with Nancy, what Edward longed for; with Florence, what her many suitors sought). This imitation indicates that he was not clear about what he himself wanted.[21] Still, despite his confusion about sexual passion, Dowell's awakening to the trials of personal relations helps him to clarify what he longs for—namely that care and transparency replace the conflict and opacity which devastate his world. And as Hynes insists, Dowell does develop a "capacity for love" (p. 230) which makes him unusual. He is a nurse at the end as at the beginning of his story. But his commitment to caring for Florence was blind. His custodianship of Nancy is enlightened by his disillusioning awareness of all the obstacles to caring personal relations which his sad story dramatizes. These obstacles find culminating expression in Dowell's isolation at the end, separated even from Nancy, their marriage indefinitely postponed by the madness which makes her opaque to him. Their relation is solipsistic. But it is also still intersubjective to the extent that Dowell can understand her world by speculating on what lies behind her repeated utterance of "Shuttlecocks!" (p. 253)—itself a comment on the conflict which plagues personal relations—and of her belief "in an Omnipotent Deity" (p. 234).

The obstacles to harmonious personal relations are increased by social dilemmas which Dowell is only beginning to reflect on as his story closes:

> I dare say it worked out for the greatest good of the body politic. Conventions and traditions I suppose work blindly but surely for the preservation of the normal type; for the extinction of proud, resolute, and unusual individuals.... Society must go on, I suppose, and society can only exist if the normal, if the virtuous, and the slightly deceitful flourish, and if the passionate, the headstrong, the too-truthful are condemned to suicide and to madness. (pp. 238, 253)

[21] I borrow the notion of "mimetic desire" from René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 1-95.

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Many read this statement as a comment on the antagonism between the passionate claims of the rebellious individual and the conventions which keep the collective united.[22] But there is a curious and telling contradiction, I think, in what "Convention" and "Passion" mean here. Conventions should preserve the community by keeping people together according to collective rules—but together at a distance which acknowledges the gap between the self and the other and which attempts to make it less volatile by putting it under the rule of law.[23] Yet Dowell's description of "Convention" aligns it with conflict rather than care. The "normal type" kill "the proud, resolute, and unusual individuals" by using the distance that conventions establish between people as a cover behind which to attack and destroy. This is essentially his indictment of Leonora, but it is also an indictment of a society where the fundamental purpose of conventions has been subverted. Now Leonora may not be as ignoble or the others as noble as Dowell suggests. But if his "proud, resolute, and unusual individuals" are noble, it is because of their capacity to sacrifice themselves for others—a capacity which Edward, Nancy, and Dowell all show, however imperfectly, but which Leonora abandons when she goes over to the conventional and the normal by destroying Edward and Nancy. In the capping irony of the novel, then, the "proud individual" is described as the representative of selfless care, where the collective has become the seat of selfish conflict. No matter how much Dowell expands his knowledge of himself and his world, by himself he cannot get beyond the collapse of care which this contradiction places at the center of the social structure.

At the end of the novel, there seems little that Dowell can do. Following Schorer, some critics condemn Dowell as lethargic and incapable of work in the world. Dowell has been extraordinarily active in his reflections, though. And he has shown himself able to act, as his defenders note, in picking Nancy up from Ceylon, in responding to the Ashburnhams' plea for his presence, and in other ways. Dowell was incapacitated by his naivete before his awakening. But his paralysis at the end owes less to his deficiencies than to the deficiencies of the

[22] Hynes argues, for example, that "Passion is the necessary antagonist of Convention, the protest of the individual against the rules" (p. 233).

[23] See Merleau-Ponty, "A Note on Machiavelli," and Ricoeur, "The Political Paradox," in *Existential Phenomenology and Political Theory*, ed. Hwa Yol Jung (Chicago: Regnery, 1972), pp. 319-67.

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world he has come to know (and still needs to learn better) by reflecting on the unreflected, penetrating the mysteries of knowledge, and examining the dilemmas of personal relations which Ford's novel portrays so starkly.

IV

Hynes justifies his interest in the epistemology of *The Good Soldier* by arguing that "a novel is a version of the ways in which a man can know reality, as well as a version of reality itself. The techniques by which a novelist controls our contact with his fictional world, and particularly his choice of point of view and his treatment of time, combine to create a model of a theory of knowledge" (p. 225). Hynes rightly includes all novels in his description of knowing in fiction. But with Ford, Conrad, and James, the epistemological aspects of the novel assume a new prominence. Their fiction not only explores the problem of knowing thematically. It also highlights the role which the ways we know play in representation and reading. The literary impressionists write meta-novels which make explicit the implicit epistemological aspects of fiction. Phenomenology's theory of literature addresses the epistemological dynamics of the reading process, representation, and the bringing together of subjectivities which artistic works make possible. As we shall see, Ford's technique in these three aspects of *The Good Soldier* mirrors the three areas which our argument has already identified as crucial to his novel's treatment of knowing.

Where Dowell's story unfolds as a dialectic between the unreflected and reflection, Wolfgang Iser describes reading as a "process of anticipation and retrospection." With every sentence we read, he explains, we project a set of expectations which our further experience with the text either confirms or modifies in a process of prospective and retrospective adjustment.[24] As we saw, Dowell shifts focus, leaves and returns to aspects of his history, corrects or at least changes his views, and offers different perspectives on events as he seeks to make the ambiguous, obscure aspects of his past experience compose into a coherent narrative pattern. We as readers also attempt to

[24] See Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" in *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 274-94.

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compose his history. And our versions of it will change insofar as the shifts in his narrative and the development of his understanding persuade us to reconsider our original interpretations. More than traditional novelists, Ford plays with the way our anticipatory and retrospective acts of interpretation challenge and change each other through the time of reading. His novel thus draws attention in the process of reading to the temporality of anticipatory understanding and retrospective reflection which, as we saw, Dowell's story dramatizes.

By manipulating the epistemology of representation, Ford's novel also seeks to initiate its readers into the mysteries of the perspectival relation between knower and known. According to Roman Ingarden, we know objects represented in fiction by borrowing from our experiences of knowing real objects. In a manner which parallels ordinary perception, novels display objects in aspects, from a certain perspective, with some sides hidden. The finitude of language makes fictional aspects fixed and schematic, unlike everyday knowing where aspects flow into and complete each other so that we have a sense of the object's fullness. Most novelists try to persuade us to compose the objects represented in a work as if the aspects which offer them were full and flowing rather than schematic and fixed.[25] But Ford challenges our desire to compose objects from aspects by having Dowell represent his history in scattered, incomplete bits and pieces which we cannot finally fit together into a full picture until the end. Ford's challenge emphasizes how objects are given to us as perceivers with an inherent incompleteness which we strive to complete. As we saw, this is what Dowell realizes when his surprise at the emergence of unexpected hidden sides shows him how much his unspoken hypotheses had erroneously completed the aspects that displayed his world so incompletely. Dowell's fragmentary, rambling, digressive, maze-like presentation resists our desire to take for granted the completeness and adequacy of our acquaintance with objects—something we take for granted in traditional fiction because we take it for granted in life.

The gap between the self and others which Dowell finds so anguishing also figures prominently in the aesthetics of Ford's novel. In reading, as Iser points out, we "think the thoughts of someone else"—

[25] See the discussions of "spots of indeterminacy" in represented objects and "the stratum of schematized aspects" in Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 246-75.

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an intersubjective and yet solipsistic process.[26] Reading is intersubjective insofar as we share the consciousness of others when we animate the acts of authorial consciousness lodged in the text and thereby live in the subjectivities of the work's characters. But this is a solipsistic activity since we engage other subjectivities in reading only by lending them our own powers of consciousness. By bemoaning his inability to engage in dialogue with his "silent listener," Dowell emphasizes both the intersubjective and the solipsistic aspects of writing and reading. As he writes, he reaches out to others; but he never leaves his own world. As we read, we inhabit his world; but we remain silent and do not converse with him because we are with Dowell only within our own consciousness. This paradoxical process exhibits the paradox of the alter ego—a paradox central, as we saw, to the novel's dramatization of the problems and possibilities of personal relations.

My phenomenological perspective on Ford's impressionism can be widened to include James and Conrad. As many critics have noticed, James, Conrad, and Ford all place the highest epistemological and aesthetic value on bewilderment. James even claims that "if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us."[27] Dowell's confusion inspires and frustrates his effort to develop a coherent, consistent point of view on the events which have outstripped his understanding. James tells his stories of bewilderment through "registers" and "reflectors" who often find themselves baffled but who respond by changing rather than losing their point of view. James's narrative practice shows his interest in how consciousness constantly, relentlessly composes despite the forces which seek to disrupt it.[28] Conrad's Marlow has been compared to James's registering consciousnesses and to Dowell in his role as narrator of *The Good Soldier*.[29] Dowell's bewilderment leads him to wonder whether exis-

[26] See Iser, *The Implied Reader*, pp. 291-94.

[27] Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Scribner's, 1962), p. 63.

[28] For more on James's understanding of consciousness, see my "Knowing in James: A Phenomenological View," *Novel*, 12 (1978), 5-20.

[29] See particularly Ian P. Watt, "Conrad, James and Chance" in *Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt*, eds. Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 301-22; Thomas C. Moser, "Conrad, Marwood, and Ford: Biographical Speculations on the Genesis of *The Good Soldier*," *Mosaic*, 8 (1974), 222-25.

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tence has meaning, but Marlow is the great metaphysical questioner. Marlow's bewilderment over his encounters with Jim and Kurtz, for example, leads him to wonder whether "belief in a few simple notions" like duty and fidelity can withstand the challenge of skepticism and hold back the darkness of nihilism.[30] In their fascination with bewilderment, the literary impressionists herald the growing awareness in modern thought and literature that the limits on how we know throw into question the status of what we know.

[30] Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 27.

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ANTHONY CHANNELL HILFER*

Mariner and Wedding Guest in William Burroughs' "Naked Lunch"

The ambience of *Naked Lunch* is established in its first narrative passage. The narrator beats the police into a subway train with the help of a young "Ivy league, advertising exec type fruit" who holds back the door for him.[1] In describing his momentary ally the narrator adopts an ingratiating insider's tone with the reader:

> I am evidently his idea of a character. You know the type comes on with bartenders and cab drivers, talking about right hooks and the Dodgers, call the counterman in Nedick's by his first name. (1)

The narrator puts out with the little performance the ad man expects:

> "So long flatfoot!" I yell, giving the fruit his B production. I look into the fruit's eyes, take in the white teeth, the Florida tan, the two hundred dollar sharkskin suit, the button-down Brooks Brothers shirt and carrying The News as a prop.
> "Only thing I read is Little Abner."
> A square wants to come on hip. . .
> "Thanks, kid," I say, "I can see you're one of our own." His face lights up like a pinball machine, with stupid, pink effect. (2)

The function of "you know the type," etc. is to identify the reader with the narrator, a fellow hip against the phony squares. Yet immediately after the above sequence the narrator uses two slang terms and parenthetically glosses them *not* for the ad man but for the reader:

> "Grassed on me he did," I said morosely. (Note: Grass is English thief slang for inform). I drew closer and laid my dirty junky fingers on his sharkskin sleeve. "And us blood

* Anthony Channell Hilfer, an Associate Profesor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, is the author of *The Revolt from the Village.*

[1] William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 1. Hereafter, *Naked Lunch* will be cited within the text.

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> brothers in the same dirty needle. I can tell you in confidence he is due for a hot shot." (Note: This is a cap of poison junk sold to addicts for liquidation purposes. Often given to informers. Usually the hot shot is strychnine since it tastes and looks like junk.) (2)

Who *then* is the square who is being conned? Throughout *Naked Lunch* the reader is treated partly as sympathetic insider, partly as mark to be titillated by the exotic phraseology of a funky counter culture. At any point in the novel the reader is either being seduced into complicity with the antisocial, even criminal fantasies of the narrative voice or being warned against such seductions or both at once.

The wooing of the reader is both direct and self-parodied. The theme of *Naked Lunch* is manipulation through media, the verbal creation of desire and dependency, the scientific management of "opinion." *Naked Lunch* is not a novel of characters or action but of voices, voices cajoling, seducing, and warning. In fact, the book needs only two main characters: (1) the narrative voice in its numerous guises, hereinafter called, for convenience sake, the narrator, and (2) the target of that voice's persuasions, a character variously known as "you," "The Reader," and "Gentle reader." The action of *Naked Lunch* is, quite simply, the moment by moment relation of narrator and reader.

The narrator's by-play with the reader begins in the Introduction. We are invited to "listen to Old Uncle Bill Burroughs" (xlviii), the quasi-folksy used car dealer connotations of which are precisely calculated. The trick, however, is to use an advertising-con sell *against* certain commodities, especially heroin which is defined in terms of the second law of thermodynamics as ultimate slowdown, waste, i. e., junk. (xlv-xlvi) But "junk" in *Naked Lunch* is a metaphor for all pain- or really person-killers: "Which side are you on? Fro-Zen Hydraulic? Or you want to take a look around with Honest Bill?" (xlvi) Honest Bill, proprietor of "*Bill's Naked Lunch Room*" (xlvi) (i. e., reality unveiled), sees Zen Buddhism as merely another form of junk allowing an escape from sensibility. The pun on frozen is explained by the narrator's comment that heroin addicts feel as if they have "a spine like a frozen hydraulic jack" (xlv-xlvi). Later we are told that the Buddha was a "notorious metabolic junkie" who "learned to metabolize his own junk" and that Mohammed was

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" dreamed up by the Mecca Chamber of Commerce. An Egyptian ad man on the skids from the sauce wrote the continuity" (114). The form of junk one finds in religious systems is, of course, verbal junk, a rhetoric to which one can become addicted. So Honest Bill is trying to get us off all forms of junk, even the opiate of the Beatniks, but in ways that he deliberately hints are themselves suspect. "Only way to protect yourself against this horrible peril is come over HERE and shack up with Charybdis... Treat you right kid... candy and cigarettes" (xlvii, Burroughs' ellipses). Charybdis, when one comes to think about it (and the author has obviously invited one to do so), is not a viable alternative to Scylla. Moreover, the pitch is a homosexual tramp con,[2] the dupe of which may end up the victim of a kind of verbal knock-out and rape.

The narrative voice then embodies its mixed motives (self-serving and early Nader-raider of rhetorical monopolies) in a strange variety of styles: carnival pitch-man ("Step right up... good for young and old, man and bestial. Nothing like a little snake oil to grease the wheels and get a show on the track Jack") (xlvi), used car salesman, homosexual tramp. Most powerfully the voice is that of the hypnotic bard, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.[3] An explication of the relation of the Ancient Mariner to the narrative voice of *Naked Lunch* is provided by the narrator himself in the persona of a professor at Interzone University.

> The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Coleridge the poet... I should like to call your attention to the symbolism of the Ancient Mariner *himself*. STUDENTS: "*Himself* the man says."

The danger of such self-exposure is indicated when the students charge the professor with switch-blades. But eventually he is able to resume:

> As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted by one of my multiple personalities... troublesome little beasts...

[2] The folk song "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" is a parody version of rosy tales of tramp life that homosexual hobos, looking for recruits, tell to those who hang around the railroad tracks. John Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest* (New York: Octagon Press, 1970), p. 203.

[3] See Frank D. McConnell, "William Burroughs and the Literature of Addiction," *Massachusetts Review*, 8 (1967), 665-80. McConnell persuasively argues the descent of *Naked Lunch* from Coleridge and Whitman, through with a quite different emphasis from my own.

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> consider the Ancient Mariner without curare, lasso, bulbocapnine, or straitjacket, albeit able to capture and hold a live audience . . . What is his hurmp gimmick? He he he he . . . He does not like so-called artists at this time, stop just *anybody* thereby inflicting unsent for boredom and working random hardship . . . He stops those who cannot choose but hear owing to an already existing relation between The Mariner (however ancient) and the Wedding Guest. . . .(87)

The students who attacked the professor were one of his multiple personalities, a grotesque projection of self-irony. The Ancient Mariner's gimmick for avoiding ironic undercutting is to pick the audience that deserves him. Implicitly, the reader is accused of being at least potentially capable of entertaining Burroughs-style fantasies. As with Coleridge's wedding guest there is an underground psychological relation between narrator and audience. In the midst of one of his most grotesque passages of sadistic perversion the narrator pauses to note "Gentle reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner" (40). A moment earlier he claims that "the ugliness of that spectacle buggers description" (39), a clue to his own intended use of the rhetorical device of "description." The narrator is admitting that he is sodomizing language, and thereby screwing up the reader's imagination.

The narrator's relation to his narrative and the readers of it is ambivalent. He is satirist and participant conjointly, like Encolpius in Petronius' *Satyricon* who mocks the ostentation of Trimalchio's dinner but is careful not to miss a course. A. J.'s party, obviously based on the *Cena Trimalchionis*, is the epitome of this two faced satire. It is a scene of the most outrageous sado-masochistic pornography but it is presented not as a supposed reality into which the audience is invited to merge its fantasies but as an illusory performance. Of course, the narrator plays it both ways. He introduces and ends the sequence as a blue movie, complete with its Stanislavskian director, The Great Slashtubitch, so that the scene is framed as a media production with three slightly bored performers simulating sexual ecstacy. However, the fantasy is carried out with a perverse vigor so that what is framed is a parody, yes, but not so much a parody of the usual blue movie as of the narrator's own obsessive sexual fantasies and virulent misogyny.[4]

[4] The narrator, though not identical with William Burroughs, has some things in common with him. Burroughs' book of self-commentary, *The Job*, is replete

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Not that the narrator does not know what he is doing. He mocks his sexual fantasies while simultaneously entertaining them and transferring them to others and he hints that the reader may have similarly mixed motives. The mutual cannibalism and hangings (reflecting the legend that a hanged man gets a monstrous erection thus becoming a perfect sexual object—lots of equipment and no personality to worry about) of the novel are the narrator's grotesque images of modern sexuality. But, in a putative obscenity trial, the narrator of *Naked Lunch* acquits himself. The defense speech is delivered by an old man addressing a young junky thief he has just shot dead:

> You have, like Houseman's barefoot shameless catamite The Congealed Shropshire Ingenue set your fleet foot on the silo of change... But you can't kill those Shropshire boys... been hanged so often he resists it like a gonococcus half castrate with penicillin rallies to a hideous strength and multiplies geometric.... So leave us cast a vote for decent acquittal and put an end to those beastly exhibitions for which the sheriff levies a pound of flesh. (102)

In other words, the narrator claims that the difference between himself and A. E. Houseman is that he has not concealed nor idealized his sexual orientation. Furthermore to put the narrator on trial would itself be a form of self-righteous sadism, with underground sexual motivations: an indignation hard-on, so to speak. Indeed, in terms of the book's sexual mythology, the beastly exhibitions would be a hanging and the pound of flesh would be the tumescence of the victim and the spectators. Ultimately the book itself is the beastly exhibition. So, it would be the (male) reader's pound of flesh which would be levied.

One of the main themes of the novel is "sending." Sending is any form of brain-washing or, to put it even more generally, any one-way communication where the sender wants to communicate his mono-logic and whose only interest in playback is to confirm that the subject of the conditioning process is making the predictable behavioral responses. All advertising, by definition, is sending. What about literature? The narrator himself raises the question: "Artists will confuse sending with creation" (168). And "sending *is* evil" (168). But again we find an

with extraordinarily misogynistic polemics. See William Burroughs, *The Job* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), especially pp. 90, 93, 110, 112.

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ambivalence since the narrator's own technique is far closer to sending than that of the traditional novelist. Of course, he sends messages exposing sending messages but this brings up a dyer's hand dilemma—how can one not be tarred with his own brush? The narrator sees sending as a biological operation, a virus infection. In one scene he evokes

> black marketeers of World War III, excisors of telepathic sensitivity, osteopaths of the spirit, investigators of infractions denounced by bland paranoid chess players, servers of fragmentary warrants taken down in hebephrenic shorthand charging unspeakable mutilations of the spirit, bureaucrats of spectral departments, officials of unconstituted police states . . . sellers of orgone tanks and relaxing machines, brokers of exquisite dreams and memories tested on the sensitized cells of junk sickness and bartered for raw materials of the will . . . Larval entities waiting for a live one. (108-9, my ellipses)

But the narrator treats the novel form itself as a larval entity waiting for a live one. The novel acts as a medium for the transference of fantasies to the reader-host. The reader is to be not so much affected as infected. There is testimony that some indeed were: "As Francis Bacon's Figure in a Landscape caused a schoolgirl to faint on the floor of the Tate Gallery, so the *Naked Lunch* caused at least one unprepared square to vomit on the carpet and leaves the mind of anyone who reads it redirected sexually." [5] The narrator carries the idea of communication as a disease even further: "Fall asleep reading and the words take on code significance . . . obsessed with codes . . . Man contracts a series of diseases which spell out a code message. . ." (66). Commenting on his own works in an interview, Burroughs emphasizes that his characters are to be taken as horrible examples:

> Heaven and hell exist in my mythology. Hell consists of falling into enemy hands, into the hands of the virus power, and heaven consists of freeing oneself from this power, of achieving inner freedom, freedom from conditioning. I may add that none of the characters in my mythology are free. If they were free they would not still be in the mythological system, that is, in the cycle of conditioned action.[6]

[5] Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 108.
[6] Quoted in Tony Tanner, *City of Words* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 110.

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We could apply the same reasoning to the images: they represent that which is to be avoided. Here again, Burroughs' narrator, in all his various roles, is analogous to the Ancient Mariner in that his whole experience is cautionary: "Don't do what I did and you won't have to feel what I felt."

Taking Coleridge's Ancient Mariner as a paradigm for the rhetorical situation in both works, the important question is what gives the Mariner the rhetorical *authority* by which he remakes the Wedding Guest into a sadder but a wiser man? Since the Mariner is a surrogate poet and the Wedding Guest a surrogate reader, the question is really one about the authority of the poem. This authority is primarily derived from the intensity and authenticity of the imagery, though the authenticity is psychologically valid rather than naively realistic. To borrow André Gide's precise description of Céline's style, "it is not reality that (Coleridge) paints but the hallucinations which reality provokes." Robert Penn Warren argues that the morality of the poem is convincing because it abstracts and generalizes the message that the authentic hallucinations convey and is in no way imposed or prefabricated.[7] But we have worked ourselves into something of a paradox: it is the power of the Mariner's hallucinations which gives him the authority to say "avoid these hallucinations." It is the images of hallucinatory experience which confer interest and value upon the Mariner, upon the poem. It is probably a psychological contradiction for a writer to say "Avoid this *glamorous* and *fascinating* experience," even if the glamor and fascination are in the mode of horror. (Rimbaud's *Season in Hell* does the same sort of thing as *Ancient Mariner* but without the cautionary.)

[7] Robert Penn Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," *Selected Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), pp. 198-305. Some readings of the poem deny Warren's justification of the moral while insisting even more on the authority of the images. See Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 108-18, 316, and Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (New York: George Braziller, 1971), pp. 568-69. Bostetter, identifying Coleridge with his Mariner, asserts, "To suffer, to be damned even, as long as he was given the power to express his suffering, as long as he could be recognized as apart and superior, Coleridge could endure; to suffer without power, that was the intolerable thing." (p. 111). Fruman defends those readers who "value the poem highly if for no other reason—and it is a good one—than that it is intense, that it gives rise to states of mind which seem to be their own reward." (pp. 568-69).

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The authority of Burroughs' narrator rests on similar grounds. His acquaintance with the night gives him a kind of grubby charisma. His control over the reader's responses is based partly on this charisma but even more on his ability to evoke images of grotesque horror that have a kinesthetic as well as emotional impact. In this respect, the narrator is as reminiscent of Hitchcock as of Coleridge. What I particularly have in mind is the scene in *Psycho* wherein Hitchcock's camera invaded the most psychologically secure area of everyone's mental household, the womb-like enclosure of the showerbath, and assaulted the audience's imagination with a violently sexualized stabbing of his heroine. The effect of the scene is to make the audience doubly participatory, both victim and assaulter, or, at best, voyeur of horror pornography. The audience responds viscerally and traumatically but the image also has staying power—it *stains* the imagination. Hitchcock obviously works on the ultimate fears and repulsions that we usually keep below the threshold of consciousness. Similarly, I can think of no modern writer with so great an aptitude as Burroughs for images that are imaginatively shocking and obsessively memorable. Every Burroughs reader can think of his own example but the following is fairly representative: "A long slug undulated out of Lee's right eye and wrote on the wall in iridescent ooze: 'The Sailor is in the City buying up Time'" (73). Like many images in *Naked Lunch*, this one conveys an intense sense of physical violation. In terms of the sending theme, the narrator has provided us with an effective example of a control technique: the implanting of an obsessively troubling image. But there is more to it than that. The narrator may have told us what he was doing, he may use it as an example of control techniques, but still he *does do it*. The narrator even boasts of the control he believes he has achieved: "Gentle Reader, the World will leap on you with leopard man iron claws, it will cut off your fingers and toes like an opportunistic land crab, it will hang you and catch your jissom like a scrutable dog, it will coil round your thighs like a bushmaster and inject a shot glass of rancid ectoplasm" (230). In an interview, Burroughs mentioned a French experiment with musical vibrations that proved near fatal to the experimenters and went on to comment, "Now there are possibilities, say at the borderline of infrasound, experimenting with very slow sounds, that you could produce rhythmic vibrations that would not necessarily be fatal or unpleasant; they might be quite the contrary. In other words, it would be another step toward

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producing—as all music, all *writing* (my italics), all art is really attempting to do—is to produce very definite psycho-physiological effects in the audience, reader, viewer, as the case may be." [8] Elsewhere in the same interview Burroughs says, "If I really knew how to write, I would write something that someone would read and it would kill them. The same way with music, or any effect you want could be produced if you were precise enough in your knowledge of technique." Burroughs' response to the interviewer's question of how this would work in writing further clarifies his concept of verbal power: "What is a writer trying to do? He's trying to reproduce in the reader's mind a certain experience, and if he were completely successful in that, the reproduction of the experience should be complete." [9]

The writer's aim, then, is the transference of fantasies to the reader, possibly in terms of what Kenneth Burke calls "the socialization of losses." Burke's example of this process in action is "the 'punitive' doctrine of 'original sin' whereby a man 'socializes' his personal loss by holding that *all* men are guilty." [10] With Burke's concept in mind, it is clear that the motives of the Ancient Mariner and of Burroughs' narrator are not only cautionary but also purgative (this is, of course, explicit in Coleridge's poem): they are spreading the wealth of their traumatically obsessive images. But, as with Coleridge, it is the horrific images that give *Naked Lunch* its authority. The experience is not only punitive (F. D. McConnell sees much of the novel as having "the fictive shape of a withdrawal symptom")[11] for both narrator and reader, but also honorific since the images are a version, however grotesque, of what Burroughs calls "other level experience." (224) Indeed, the horrors of *Naked Lunch*, although continually qualified by irony and black humor, are what constitute its claim for transcendence, at least in the form of "transcendence downwards" or

[8] Robert Palmer, "Rolling Stone Interview: William Burroughs," *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 1972, p. 48.

[9] "Rolling Stone Interview," p. 49.

[10] Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 312-13. Bostetter notes that at the end of Coleridge's poem we are confronted "by the eternally alienated Mariner alienating in his turn the Wedding Guest, for the Guest is robbed of his happiness and the spontaneous participation in the marriage feast and forced to share the disillusioned wisdom and guilt of the Mariner." Bosetter, p. 116.

[11] McConnell, p. 677.

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"transdescendence."[12] As with the surrealists, images of horror instance a privileged perception of the modern world. The hallucinatory horror of the images enables the narrator to perform a grand *salto* above the usual banal reductions of experience to the level of the quotidian. To put it another way, the narrator believes the "square's" world is as grotesque as anything *Naked Lunch* portrays (indeed, he believes it is what *Naked Lunch* portrays), but the properly illuminated artist *sees* the horror and can come to imaginative terms with it. The artist can, in fact, try to infect the square with a set of metaphysical shakes—as a kindly therapeutic device.

Thus to some degree the narrator resembles Doctor "Fingers" Schafer, the Lobotomy Kid, who is accused of "the unspeakable crime of brain rape" (105). But unlike Doctor Schafer's, the narrator's attempts at lobotomy are never forcible. They demand the cooperation of the reader who is, as we have seen, abundantly forewarned by the narrator. The narrator even suggests, at the same time as he parodies, a possible reader response to the sexual fantasies that the narrator satirizes without really disowning:

> Sick people disgust me already. When some citizen starts telling me about his cancer of the prostate or his rotting septum make with that purulent discharge I tell him
> 'You think I am innarested to hear your horrible old condition. I am not innarested at all.' (122)

The narrator, then, is both sending and countersending his fantasies. The whole set of these fantasies, which the reader is continually

[12] "Transcendence downwards" or "trans*des*cendence" are Jean Wahl's terms for religious experience based on the liberation of subconscious, demonic forces in the self. Citing Blake, Gide, Lawrence, and Powys, Wahl asserts "Il s'agit pour eux de retrouver quelque chose d'elementaire, de Farouche, 'ange ou demon, qu'importe,'" Jean Wahl, *Existence humaine et transcendence* (Neuchatel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1944), p. 40. Saul Bellow's *Herzog* attacks Wahl, protesting against the "inspired condition" which is "thought to be attainable only in the negative and is so pursued in philosophy and literature as well as in sexual experience, or with the aid of narcotics, or in 'philosophical,' 'gratuitous' crime and similar paths of horror. (It seems never to occur to such 'criminals' that to behave with decency to another human being might also be 'gratuitous.') Intelligent observers have pointed out that 'spiritual' honor or respect formerly reserved for justice, courage, temperance, mercy, may now be earned in the negative by the grotesque." *Herzog* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), pp. 163-64.

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cajoled toward and warned against, amounts to the narrator's own patented symbol system, *Naked Lunch* being a book about the transmission and reception of symbol systems. A symbol system can be defined as any system of symbols that unifies perceptions and conceptions into an articulated set that is received as truth whether of a limited sort (the mathematical set that puts two and two together to make four) or universal sort (the idea that nothing is true that cannot be mathematically proven). Advertising is an instance of a rhetoric continually sending us messages seemingly limited (i. e., buy a Cadillac rather than a Lincoln) but actually reinforcing an ideology with universal claims (i. e., luxurious cars are part of a world order that is natural, proper, enviable, *right*).[13] This sort of persuasion is not purely verbal; indeed, the architecture of a city is a rhetorical persuasion of the universal sort: in American cities it is banks rather than cathedrals that aspire to the heavens, sending the message of monetary power to the masses below. Throughout *Naked Lunch* the narrator attempts to gain consent less to particular propositions than to the bizarre sensibility embodied in his narrative. In so doing he is parodying the fashion in which the senders of a technologized culture obtain the consent of the governed by manipulating their "symbol systems" (21) so that they accept brutal outrages to their humanity as a normal and justifiable state of affairs. Dr. Benway, an expert consultant on totalitarian manipulation, explains:

> The subject must not realize that the mistreatment is a deliberate attack of an anti-human enemy on his personal identity. He must be made to feel that he deserves *any* treatment he receives because there is something (never specified) horribly wrong with him. The naked need of the control addicts must be decently covered by an arbitrary and intricate bureaucracy so that the subject cannot contact his enemy direct. (21)

Benway achieves his purpose of Total Demoralization:

> Documents issued in vanishing ink faded into old pawn tickets. New documents were constantly required. The citizens rushed from one bureau to another in a frenzied attempt to meet impossible deadlines.
>
> All benches were removed from the city, all fountains

[13] See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

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turned off, all flowers and trees destroyed. Huge electric buzzers on the top of every apartment house (everyone lived in apartments) rang the quarter hour. Often the vibrations would throw people out of bed. Searchlights were played over the town all night (no one was permitted to use shades, curtains, shutters or blinds).

No one ever looked at anyone else because of the strict law against importuning, with or without verbal approach, anyone for any purpose, sexual or otherwise...

No one was permitted to bolt his door, and the police had pass keys to every room in the city. Accompanied by a mentalist they rush into someone's quarters and "start looking for it."

. . . . . .

After a few months of this the citizens cowered in corners liwe neurotic cats. (22-23)

The purpose of the narrator's passages of black humor is to break the circuits of the senders. He provides models of fantasy forms that can be used as defenses against the control addicts (i. e., those who are addicted to controlling others). He provocatively argues, as we have seen, that much of what passes for contemporary "reality" is mere public fantasy, supported by continual injections of media junk. But there is a problem here: where does such a mediated reality leave off and "real reality" begin? *Naked Lunch* is not clear on this point. At times the narrator seems to suppose that he can serve up the *Ding-an-sich* at the end of his fork. Mostly, however, he is in tune with modern atonality and portrays everything as mediated and (though it doesn't really follow) anyone's reality as the form of junk to which he happens to be addicted, so that what really matters is who can *impose* his fantasy. The narrator's dilemma in *Naked Lunch* is that he wants to discredit the competing senders and clear the air waves to send out his own junk but he also wants to expose *all* sending, his own included.

With this dilemma at the center of *Naked Lunch* it is no wonder that one of its recurring motifs is the double agent. The narrator mentions "the case of a female agent who forgot her real identity and merged with her cover story" (27). Most of the major characters in the novels are alternatively on the side of the senders and of the resistance. This is "because all Agents defect and all Resisters sell out..." (205). The problem is how to rebel against a technocratic society without the

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rebellion itself being ultimately shaped by the media of technology and thus eventuating as a change in personnel rather than structure. One way might be to use the technology, especially the sending media, but scramble them to one's own ends. Even the terminal addition to flesh can be turned to the uses of visionary revision: [14]

> This is revelation and prophecy of what I can pick up without FM on my 1920 crystal set with antennae of jissom... Gentle reader, we see God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm... Through these orifices transmute your body... The way OUT is the way IN....(229)

But only the "gentle reader" who is also an easy mark would buy this product. First, the source of the revelation and prophecy the passage delivers is the narrator's wired up body, his 1920 crystal set. That the body is a communications medium sending messages of radiating energy is old doctrine—it is what Whitman meant by the "body electric." And the energy sent is obviously sexual: "antennae of jissom." But isn't this another form of brain rape, since if the narrator is receiving revelation by such equipment, with what else could he be sending it on to the gentle reader? The narrator in this passage is "sending," in just the manner he himself so sharply satirized. The narrator's "sending" is especially clear in the sentence beginning "Gentle reader," which having invoked the genteel reader of Nineteenth century English fiction, a reader who could rely on the propriety of his relation with a morally normative narrator, proceeds to an ultimate outrage, using an image whose sordid shock value *must* impress— but in the fashion of the British navy doing *their* impressing: a knock on the head and one wakes up on the Bounty with Captain Bligh as the tour guide. The narrator is offering to be the reader's tour guide through "other-level" (224) transdescendentalist experiences, related to normative experiences only by way of radical inversion (*anal* sexuality, a trans*des*cendentalist vision of God). The reader is commanded to transform himself: "Through these orifices, transmute your body." But to what? The models offered in *Naked Lunch* are not encouraging. The entire passage is a brilliant assertion that "The way OUT is the way IN"—that is, that we can escape the symbol system

[14] McConnell, pp. 675-78, shows that the basic form of addiction attacked in *Naked Lunch* is our addiction to life and desire. Corporeality is an automatically terminal form of addiction.

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our technological world tries to sell us by using all its technology and sending techniques but with the messages inverted. Of course, in keeping with the double agent theme, the reader should be suspicious that inversion is no true contrary, but only the flip side of a counterfeit coin. The transdescendentalist message encoded in this passage is as dubious as any of the other rhetorical impositions satirized in *Naked Lunch*. But by the time the narrator pulls this final con, he is addressing a reader so toughened up by the rhetorical exercises of *Naked Lunch* as to have lost his gentleness. The narrator indeed taunts the reader who has not: "Why all this waste paper getting the people from one place to another? Perhaps to spare the reader stress of sudden space shifts and keep him gentle" (218). The novel's paradoxically enabling gesture is to create readers capable of rejecting its most seductive overtures.

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Book Reviews

Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method by Gérard Genette, translated by Jane E. Lewin, Foreword by Jonathan Culler. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980. Pp. 285. $15.00.

Jonathan Culler characterizes Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* as "one of the central achievements of what was called 'structuralism.'" That spoiler of a past tense and Genette's rather humble introduction and afterword reduce *Narrative Discourse* to a document of critical history rather than a viable theory, a flower of decay rather than a bud of new beginnings. The resulting pall cast over the book awakens the critic in one, despite the fact that this study is one of the most admirable available on its subject. Measured, insightful, self-conscious, generalizable—it has all the virtues that modern scholarship esteems. What is it then that makes us stand back and reserve judgment until the inevitable flaws show through?

Genette sets out to analyze narrative discourse according to categories borrowed from the grammar of verbs: tense, mood, and voice. At the same time he chooses to illustrate his typology—or perhaps to rival it—with an analysis of Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu*. His typologies are powerful enough to show up other theorists, who chronically confuse their own categories, while his analysis reveals the uniqueness of Proust's achievement as a manipulation of the very narrative categories that Genette has isolated. Where other narratologists stop at the meta-level, Genette's theory pays off in his analysis, and the inexperienced reader is supplied with a guide to application that is both disciplined and inspired. Though I am no expert on Proust, I suspect that Proustian scholars will be much impressed with Genette's work, while narrative theorists will undoubtedly find it, as Culler does, "the most thorough attempt we have to identify, name, and illustrate the basic constituents and techniques of narrative."

Or will they? Beyond the author's rather cloying ardor for etymology, his conscientious coining of terminology which he almost immediately consigns to the garbage heap of history, and his occasional undecipherable "formulae" for narrative, the utility of this book is marred by two related problems. The first is Genette's inability to recognize mimesis when he sees it; the second is his failure to include literary and ideological norms within his scheme. I suppose that these are what Culler means by the label of "structuralism" when he declares—again in the past tense—that it "sought not to interpret literature but to investigate its structures and devices." But the attempt at investigating structures and devices without spelling out the conditions for interpretation is surely wrong-headed, and in Genette's case in particular, where at least half of his book is "practical criticism," the failure to engage these conditions is striking. Moreover, this failure is *not* a given of structuralist thinking. All we need witness are Jan Mukařovský's *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Value as Social*

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Facts or Claude Lévi-Strauss's criticism of Propp's "formalism" to be reminded that the aim of structuralism is to account for *all* the systems that compose a text, among which are the literary and the referential worlds.

The issue of mimesis is of particular importance, I think, because Genette's position is meant as a corrective to much previous imprecision on the subject. He claims that

> in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can "show" or "imitate" the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, "alive," and in that way give more or less the *illusion of mimesis*—which is the only narrative mimesis, for this single and sufficient reason: that narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating. . . . [M]imesis in words can only be mimesis of words. (164)

Presumably the world needs to be reminded of this "fact" from time to time. Lessing and Thomas Twining performed this service for the eighteenth century, although the effects of their efforts were soon blunted. But Genette lives in another time. During the past century the concept of imitation has been examined with enough sophistication to make his disclaimer appear as simplistic as the confusion of description with imitation that he criticizes. Perhaps the exposure to such errors in researching *Mimologiques* has led Genette to this "hard line" on mimesis, but his own insights into narrative structures are enormously suggestive in the argument for narrative iconicity.

For example, Genette repeatedly emphasizes the fact that narrative time can never be treated as an absolute, in that its only "real" basis is the definitionally variable reading time. Nevertheless, he argues, temporal relations *can* be established in the relative amount of narrative space an author uses to depict an extent of story time, this resulting in four narrative "movements": ellipsis (zero narrative time for *n* story time), summary (NT<ST), scene (NT=ST), and pause (*n* NT=zero ST). In the rhythm (*anisochrony* for Genette) of narration that a writer establishes, these different relations would seem inevitably tied to mimesis. It is not that NT can actually equal ST, but that its extent can make it either more or less equivalent to ST in comparison to other narrative extents. In Peircean terms, this contrast is the difference between an image and a diagram: both are iconic signs, the one sharing substantive traits with its referent, the other sharing the relations among its components with its referent. Thus, if an author systematically mixed the four movements he would be foiling mimesis, since the relations among the extents of his various paragraphs of chapters would not correspond to the relations among the extents of his narrated episodes. On the other hand, if an author consistently used any of the four temporal structures he would be diagrammatically iconic, although the kind or narrative that would eventuate from certain choices might be deviant, or even unrealizable. But such an outcome in itself would be worth investigating. And indeed, the reasons why certain techniques create the "illusion of mimesis" while others do not is also worth looking into. If a scene creates this illusion, is this not because *relative* co-extension in time is the basis for narrative iconicity rather than some simple-minded notion of absolute equality?

But Genette's elimination of all questions of literary and extra-artistic norms

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is equally disturbing. Given the analytic tools he supplies, one would expect to be able to describe general trends in the history of narrative that would carry value-laden names, such as "traditional," "classic," or "innovative." Not only are these trends not provided in *Narrative Discourse*, but no theory is offered as to how such norms, once determined, could be integrated into an overall structural analysis. This omission is all the more striking when Genette actually claims a virtuosity in Proust's handling of certain devices. Where is the careful establishment of the norms against which Proust's perfomance is to be measured as unique, and where the outline of the cultural values that will make that particular uniqueness admirable?

In addition to literary norms, Genette ignores what Boris Uspenskij and Michail Bachtin would term the "ideological plane" of narration. Uspenskij treats this as one of four components of point of view in his *Poetics of Composition*, and though neither his nor Bachtin's discussion has the precision of Genette's work, the positioning of a text vis-à-vis ideological values is not an aspect of its structure that can be omitted simply because it is hard to talk about. Surely the strength of structuralism *was* that it took on methodological problems so complicated that whole disciplines had to be constructed in order to solve them. It would seem that narratology has a long way to go before it lives up to the aspiration of being a structuralist discipline.

WENDY STEINER

University of Pennsylvania

Critical Assumptions by K. K. Ruthven. Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. x + 263. $23.95.

The English used to look askance at American books of criticism: they were "Germanic," which meant that they probed too deeply, doggedly, and artlessly. The Americans used to speak about English criticism as "genteel," which meant that it didn't probe deeply enough. That division belongs pretty much to the past. There are only occasional outbreaks illustrating it, and then only when critics on one side or another relax their preoccupation with the French. K. K. Ruthven teaches in New Zealand, and his book is written for students, not for critical theorists. As such, it can be partially excused for not probing very deeply and for its plethora of quotation and reference. But not entirely.

Ruthven is interested in what he regards as "four recurrent problems in the history of criticism." They are genesis, form, meaning, and value. In twelve chapters how these problems have been approached is discussed, always with voluminous reference and quotation, the latter always brief. I open the book at random and discover on one page (122) the following referred to: Tennyson, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Nabokov, Chaplin, Delalande (a writer invented by Nabokov), Borges, Kafka, Browning, Peckham, Joyce, Rabelais, LeClercq, Browne, Eliot, Homer, Pound, Li Po, *Discours sur les ombres* (by Delalande), *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, the metaphysical poets, *Ulysses*, *Odyssey*, and *Cathay*. And this is a slightly shortened, section-ending page!

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One wonders what the influence might be here, and the mind turns to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, astonishing in its range of reference. (Frye also gets the last word in this book.) But one concludes that in this case something may have gone a little wrong: we may have here a not wholly self-conscious version of what Frye called the Menippean satire, which unfolds erudition in the way a peacock displays its tail. What is lacking to make the formula work is Menippean wit and speculation. This book does not work out a position but examines or, let us say, accumulates descriptions of critical trends. (Of course, it *does* have a position, which is tacitly held or slipped in in the form of brief concluding assertions at the close of chapter sections.)

The descriptions are broadly conceived. Ruthven is not concerned to look very deeply into the work of any one critical theorist or even one text. The manner is to pile up a series of brief quotations, allusions, and descriptions. Thus in the chapter "Imitation and Originality" the three-page section on "Originality as a mark of genius" begins with a five-word quotation from Johnson's Imlac, offers a generalization about the eighteenth-century attitude toward originality as against imitation, quotes Young (thirteen words), notes the connection of originality to the contemporary interest in "genius," alludes to two scholarly essays on this matter, quotes Pope on Shakespeare (thirteen words), names four eighteenth-century books on originality, offers seventeen lines of comment on Horace, moves on to discuss the fashion of natural genius, quoting Johnson, Young again, Croce, Anthony Storr on psychiatrists, and a gaggle of of others in a concluding paragraph. The whole chapter is sixteen pages long, is mainly about the imitation of nature or of human actions. Its introductory section ends with the following:

> ...there was once a time, not so very long ago, when it seemed the sensible thing to accept the impossibility of saying anything original and to devote one's energies instead to saying what has been said before, but in a manner much superior to that of one's predecessors. *This is what the theory of imitation is all about.* [my italics]

But it is *not* what the theory of imitation is *all* about, as anyone who has read *Republic*, *Poetics*, and McKeon on this subject knows very well. Imitation has always had two faces as Pope remarked of Virgil's copying nature when he copied Homer. Ruthven, of course, knows this (he has apparently read everything, as attested to by forty-seven pages of footnotes), but he doesn't examine the deeper aspects of imitation that invoke what he himself calls "transactions with reality." We are not encouraged when we read in the next line: "The earliest surviving literary theory of imitation is in the *Poetics* of Aristotle." This may be strictly true, but Plato had a theory of imitation with at least literary implications, and Aristotle was concerned enough about it to try to answer it. Ruthven does not discuss it and even *seems* to be saying that it does not exist. This is an example of a flaw in the way Ruthven's book carries on. Despite its barrage of erudition from nearly everywhere in the history of criticism, the book is fundamentally ahistorical. That Aristotle offered his theory in a situation that involved Plato, that he worked with Plato's terms, and that this is part of his meaning are not made clear.

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The same problem comes up in Ruthven's treatment of the Kantian notion of beautiful uselessness without attention to any of the reasons why such a notion should arise or how uselessness in some authors becomes an ironic term and even a moralistic one. The notion of "purposiveness without purpose" or "internal purposiveness" receives similarly superficial treatment in connection with the problem of intention. This is a somewhat odd perspective and results in distortion. Ruthven does not halt long enough to examine any idea deeply and for the most part he ignores historical context. In a book on Nietzsche, Walter Kaufmann argues quite rightly that we won't understand Nietzsche unless we ask what he opposed, what he sought to overcome, what his problems were. Any thinker's expression must be treated in this way if one is to be accurate.

There are a number of statements in the book that if not entirely inaccurate are not responsible either. Six examples:

1. "The reason for this is that organicist critics from Coleridge onwards have generally agreed that the two kinds of form are in fact antithetical to one another." Why not from Schlegel onwards?

2. "For if everything in a poem is predetermined to this extent, involuntary experiences bring us about as close as we are ever likely to get to an awareness of those unconscious drives which shape everything we do." The logic of this is slippery. Perhaps a step is missing.

3. "...*A Vision* dictated to [Yeats] through the medium of his wife by a supernatural being called Michael Robartes." Robartes is a fictional, but not a supernatural being, and he did not dictate *A Vision* via Mrs. Yeats. He did not dictate it at all.

4. "So Forster concludes that since 'all literature tends towards a condition of anonymity,' any signature on it can only be a distraction. As if to test the truth of this claim, I. A. Richards was shortly to circulate unsigned poems for comment...." In spite of the disclaiming "as if," this plays fast and loose with Richards' intention, probably in order to effect a transition in the discourse.

5. "...a novel semingly without authorial presence. Such too was Joyce's ambition in writing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*." But it is Stephen, as Ruthven allows, who preaches this theory, and there is authorial presence in certain ways in the novel.

6. "Oh 'darkly, deeply, beautifully blue',
As someone somewhere sings about the sky.

The 'someone' Byron fails to recall is Southey...." But *has* Byron forgotten? Or is it a sly put-down? Now this is a minor matter, as are the others. But I am compelled to wonder how many more there are and whether or not they may not be products of a characteristically loose method of quoting and alluding.

Nevertheless, I find that this book could be helpful to students and to teachers. For students it identifies clusters of fundamental critical issues and provides a compendium of quotations and references that can be followed up. For the teacher, it can be a foil. The teacher can expand upon it, fill in its gaps, quarrel with the brevity of Ruthven's accounts, and point to the author's own assumptions. Ruthven never takes any question to the point where anything resembles a last word is said.

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Yet he does make some utterances as if they were last words. In the end he is, I think, a more sophisticated version of the English type of critic thought by Americans to be "genteel." This newest version has metamorphosed into an antitheoretical skeptic. I have some sympathy with a form of antitheoretical theory, but I have very little with Ruthven's ahistorical version of it, which leaves critical theory in a shambles. He conveys the impression of looking down on a jumble of perspectives, ideas, quotations, and phrases, a scene of folly that adds up to little and has had no direction. The reason for this is principally his ignoring the historical moment of every critical utterance, the absence of which generates the absence of the dignity and seriousness of the critical discourses to which he alludes. This is not what we find when we go back to the texts themselves. I acknowledge that many of these complaints can be made to stand against any effort of Ruthven's sort. I ought to know, because I wrote a book of this same general kind about twelve years ago.

The final complaint that can be made against Ruthven's and other such books is that—in this critical climate—they are out of date by the time that they arrive. In Ruthven's case the omissions are rather glaring. There is no treatment of the so-called post-structuralist movement. That couldn't be accomplished unless Ruthven had paid more attention to recent critical theory in general. One finds only passing mention of the structuralist movement (Barthes is mentioned), no discussion of Heidegger and phenomenological criticism (except brief mention of Poulet and Miller), hardly anything on modern hermeneutics (no mention of Gadamer and Ricoeur, though Hirsch is alluded to and two chapters are devoted to meaning), only brief mention of speech-act theory (Austin and Searle), and no mention of Derridean deconstruction whatsoever. Nor does Ruthven allude to some of the critics who have tried to resolve the differences upon which Ruthven builds his chapters—Krieger on imitation and expression, for example.

Still, the book is erudite, readable, and, within its bounds, informative. No matter that the map it lays out is, in the end, unconsciously Menippean.

The price for this sort of book is astonishing, even in an age of astonishing prices for books.

Hazard Adams

University of Washington

Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy by Giuseppe Mazzotta. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. xv + 343. $20.00.

Giuseppe Mazzotta's valuable contribution to Dante studies is a *tour de force* of harmonization which may well make him the *Concordiae comes* of the profession. At first glance this dense volume (weighted down at times by a ponderous latinate style) seems to offer what might be seen as "a typically Italian" (though for that reason not necessarily unsatisfactory) solution to a difficult problem. As in the story of the Italian judge who listens to plantiff and defendent and tells them they are both right, and then answers a third-party observer

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who objects that they cannot both be right by saying "you are right!", Mazzotta seems to have discovered the way of compromise which bridges the gap of discord separating the "literalists," who see Dante's way of writing as one which imitates the allegorical mode of Scripture, and the "fabulists," who see the theological, figural and prophetic elements of the *Comedy* as nothing more than part of Dante's strategy as a producer of fiction.

At worst Mazzotta's study, or that portion, at least, which deals with the question of allegory, will be cast aside as the machinations of a "neutral angel" (of which danger he seems to be aware, just as he seems to be aware that his own text, like Dante's in Mazzotta's formulation, may be its own most subversive adversary). At best, by denying us the critical palliative that we seek as a source of relief from Dante's dolorous complexities, he may have succeeded in demonstrating that the *Divine Comedy* is not only a monument to medieval encyclopedism, but a genuine act of reconciliation of the ultimate immutable reality of the Logos with the contingent corruptible reality of the text.

The general purpose of this study is to "probe Dante's sense of history" by focussing on the "structure and language of history... the relationship between history and literary language" and the vexing question of allegory accompanied by the related ambiguities which Mazzotta calls the "historicity of interpretation" (p. 3). The author begins with an examination of the image of the Old Man of Crete (the *Gran Veglio* of Inferno XIV) and the related figure of Cato in Purgatory I and II. In so doing he shows quite convincingly (with considerable improvement over the original dissertation chapter) how Roman history figures as part of salvation history and the redemptive process. In Chapter IV (Vergil and Augustine) he shows how the "theological harmonization of the earthly and heavenly cities" is made possible by "a partial revision of St. Augustine's view of Roman history" (p. 6). Central to the argument are the divergent notions of Dante and Augustine on the historicity of Vergil's *Aeneid* and the role of Rome's history in the process of redemption, and in a movement through the inevitable corruptibility of the secular order to the ultimate goal of eternal glorification. The *Aeneid* is seen, from Dante's rectified perspective, as a poem of love and a book of history "which, though immersed in a condition of temporality and finitude, strains toward the enduring atemporality of Heaven and enacts a view of history as a sequence of events significant in God's providential plan" (p. 158). Mazzotta ultimately and most convincingly argues that Dante "implies that history enacts typologically the pattern of Exodus" (p. 182). This, in turn, implies, it seems to me, that the text is rightly to be regarded as a *figura* of history. It is history in the same way that history, like the meta-statements of historiography, is grammar and text. In a logocentric world fraught with semiotic complexities and hermeneutic perils, one which ranges from the emanation of the divine Word to the cloacal sememes trumpeted by the devils of the infernal realm, one must confront the problem of interpretation, as Mazzotta does in a strenuous and imaginative way in his concluding chapters.

The final chapters, dealing with literary history, allegory and the language of faith, are perhaps the most provocative but also the most problematic. If the *Aeneid* is to be understood as history, then "history," as Mazzotta has noted

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earlier (p. 158), "cannot be taken literally." By the same token, he concludes, "The distinction between poetic allegory and theological allegory depends not on an intrinsic separation of truth and lies in the literal sense, but on an act of interpretation: 'the theologians take the literal sense otherwise that the poets do'; the truth of the literal sense, then, lies not in the actual enunciation, but in what the literal sense signifies" (p. 235). History and historiography (including the records of conversion) suffer the "ambiguity of the letter" provoked by what in Peircean terms might be called the inevitable flight of the interpretant. The dilemma of unlimited semiosis acts to subvert the text as authority and causes the interpreter to enjoy the pleasures of the promised end as long as he is immersed in the "historicity of interpretation." The text, then, becomes the desert where temptations are encountered. What is not especially clear in Mazzotta's argument of harmonization, where the truth depends on the interpretation of the enunciation, is the conviction that the text may be hermeneutically closed at the same time that it is semiotically open. It is an open desert, a "writerly" text in Barthes' sense, which threatens the reader with the temptation of a new interpretation, while at the same time it leads that reader to one certain *telos*. The reader will become either an Adam or a Christ by analogy. As in the threefold temptation of Christ in the desert, the Tempter may use the word (Scripture) itself to deceive, and only a process of "rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2.15)" will dispel the deception. Just as Satan's misuse of Scripture, though literally accurate, does not invalidate the literal accuracy of the text itself, just so does Mazzotta's attempt to resolve the question of truth at the interpretive level leave inviolate Singleton's notion of the *fundamental* veracity of the enunciation itself. This does not mean that we can confidently answer the question "Did Dante really go to Hell?," which, for most readers, I would guess, remains a valid one, but rather that the verbal incarnation which is presented as the literal text is indeed a non-deceptive *interpretation* of a spiritual and intellectual event.

Mazzotta has written a fine, well-documented book which is a significant addition to the shelves of Dante criticism. It sheds much light on the important questions of history and Vergil's contribution to the *Divine Comedy* as well as that of the poem's meaning. The questions it raises are significant ones which ought to continue to demand the attention of Dante scholars.

Andrea di Tommaso

Wayne State University

The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies by Susan Snyder. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. ix + 185. $12.50.

One interesting feature of this book is that its critical method works against the very assumptions it seeks to prove. Susan Snyder observes that since Shakespeare wrote ten "successful" comedies before he wrote his great tragedies, "...it seems probable that he would use the dramatic conventions in which he was most at home, the world of romantic comedy, as a point of reference and

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departure in developing tragic form" (p. 4). Aside from the problem in her notion of what was "successful," she does not explain why Shakespeare's tragic form should have developed from his comedies rather than from his histories, his poetry, and his early tragedies nor why he was more at home in one genre than another. To address such questions would require some consideration of the economic, social, and literary historical factors that affected the production and reception of Shakespeare's texts. Instead she takes Northrop Frye's argument for comedy and tragedy as her critical model and supplements it with Suzanne Langer's discussion of comic rhythm. Hence from the outset the book posits an assumption about the historical development of Shakespeare's literary forms to be argued in terms of a critical theory which is radically paradigmatic and thus cannot account for historical development.

Professor Snyder's first chapter surveys comic conventions in eighteen "popular" comedies of the 1580's and 90's, "popular" apparently meaning public theater productions. Much of this chapter covers familiar ground, but the discussion does not consider Rosalie Colie's work, particularly her *Resources of Kind*, and so we find conventions and devices discussed as if they were largely indigenous to comedy. The second chapter concerns *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, two Italianate tragedies employing comic conventions "to reveal the vulnerability of love, threatened from without in *Romeo and Juliet*, from within in *Othello*" (p. 89). The third chapter argues that comic convention enabled Shakespeare to explore the issues of human power and benevolence in *Hamlet*, while the last chapter argues that grotesque comedy is Shakespeare's way of asking questions "about the purpose of all human experiences" (p. 165). For all their fine moments, the readings of the plays as a whole tend to treat Shakespeare as an author writing without a historical audience and yet sharing the eighteenth century's hierarchy of literary forms, the nineteenth century's belief in universal human truths and the twentieth century's modernist sensibilities. There is no historical change from *Romeo and Juliet* to *King Lear* in Professor Snyder's system. The problem centers on a notion of literary convention as somehow independent of the fluctuations of social history, and hence free of the exigencies of Shakespeare's needs to communicate with a specific audience. Thus despite the virtues of some insightful discussions–particularly in Chapters Two and Four–this book begs the very questions it seeks to address.

LEONARD TENNENHOUSE

Wayne State University

Interpreting Interpreting: Interpreting Dickens' Dombey by Susan R. Horton. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 162. $12.00.

This book is an ambitious project. Susan Horton wants "not so much to discuss what *Dombey and Son* means as to find out how all novels mean" (ix). Her title is, from this point of view, indicative of her emphasis. Three quarters of her book is concerned with the nature of interpretation, one quarter with Dickens.

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Specifically, Horton wants to defend the critical operation which produces an explication of a text against recent suggestions by Stanley Fish and E. D. Hirsch that, since this method cannot establish a single fixed meaning, critics should concern themselves with asking historical and sociological questions. In answer, Horton would like to show that a plurality of readings and a certain indeterminacy of meaning are inevitable and are not, in practice, incompatible with the "fiction of a stable entity" without which the interpretative process "spins off into outer space" (128).

The center of Horton's attempt to reconcile the subjective and objective elements in interpretation lies in her discussion of what she calls the hermeneutical model. The model essentially articulates the assumption of New Criticism that the work was self-defining and that the individual details becomes meaningful or symbolic within the context of some conception of the whole. New Criticism was based on a certain idea of the second reading of a work which assumed that the critic brought to this reading a total, spatial vision of the text. Horton argues that the expectation of a single meaning is the result of this too-simple assumption. She shows that various critics of *Dombey* have defined both part and whole differently—the part as word, sentence, or paragraph; the whole as single text, the author's entire work, or all the works in a genre—and that each of these assumptions has resulted in a radically different reading. Finally, drawing an analogy to the "uncertainty principle" in modern physics, she argues the ultimate unpicturability of the whole and, consequently, the inevitable partiality of any reading.

This partiality, then, is not so much a failure of interpretation as its inevitable condition. A reading is always partially true, partially false. But this does not mean that all readings are equally valid. Once the variables of interpretation are known, the various definitions of part and whole sketched out, it is possible to define a certain area of meanings, although, because of the variations in the interpreter, this area can never be absolutely fixed. In addition the critic can aspire to the widest possible context and can avoid being trapped in a single interpretation by constantly invoking other alternatives.

Horton's discussion of *Dombey* itself is a clear example of the practical effects of her theoretical conclusions. Since she has rejected the possibility of a spatialized vision of the work, her approach involves itself with the temporality of the reading experience and, in this sense, it is close to what she refers to as Stanley Fish's reader-response criticism. Even when she is invoking the widest possible context, which, for her, is provided by the letters Dickens wrote during *Dombey's* composition, this context is used not so much to provide an overall statement of the theme of the novel as to relate certain passages to certain effects Dickens wanted to produce in the reader. And even the tentative definition of theme which her argument allows is constantly qualified by an immediate reference to other approaches which would ignore or subordinate this theme.

I think this is a fair statement of Horton's argument. What can be said about it?

Most obviously, it is clear that the relation she establishes between the critic and the work remains entirely traditional. Despite her references to the "fiction" of a stable center to the work there is no doubt that, for Horton,

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the text does have meanings which are in some sense the expression of the author's intentions. Her argument is not at all about the possibility of such meaning. She simply answers a certain skepticism about its determination by developing a theory of perspectivism which saves partial interpretation. All this is apparent in Horton's central example of the nature of the text, Isamu Noguchi's sculpture entitled "Cubic Pyramid." The polished sides of this piece reflect both changing patterns of light and the perceiver himself. In order to see the work as a totality, the critic would have to stand before it for eternity. His view is inevitably limited. But, on the other hand, there is no doubt that the work is there, that it is the product of an intention. The solidity of its form and intention are, for her, one with the solidity of its physical presence.

Her sense of a totality which is the origin and sum of indeterminate perspectives is one posible explanation for certain conflicting tendencies in Horton's book. On the one hand, she obviously wants to free criticism from the tyranny of the idea of a single, total meaning so that it can admit subjective factors and celebrate what she refers to as the "nice fillips" (23) in a work. At the same time, however, Horton can never relax in her discussion of these limited moments. Each interpretation must be immediately balanced by another interpretation and that by another interpretation. Her discussion consequently proceeds with a kind of nervous impatience which, for me, robs it of much of its value. This impatience, her search for the widest context, and her references to her book as an attempt to "stand aside" (3) from individual interpretations in a way which would reveal, and presumably escape, the inevitability of limitation which is the center of her argument, all suggest that the idea of a unified vision of the work attracts her in a way which makes the fall into a restricted point of view claustrophobic.

How can we explain the persistent attraction which this vision has for Horton? Her own example of Noguchi's sculpture suggests one answer. Horton tells us that she chose *Dombey and Son* because she "loves" (11) it. The viewer before the "Cubic Pyramid" is like the critic before the text is like the lover before a beloved. This beloved is various, but this only increases her attractiveness. Others may love her for these various qualities: her hair, her eyes, her appearance in a certain light, her "nice fillips." The true critic, the true lover desires these. But he loves more. He loves what she really is, her inner self, the "protean" (55) form of Dickens within the novels, the solidity of the stone behind the reflecting surface.

It is interesting to think, in this context, about the relationship between the critic's desire for a total picture of the work and the structure of a certain kind of romantic love. Since, moreover, the protean form the viewer would glimpse in the mirrored surface of the "Cubic Pyramid" would obviously be his own, it would be even more interesting to submit this relationship to Lacan's discussion of narcissism in his article on the *stade du miroir*.

But Horton's book is most striking in its illustration of how a theory which, on a manifest level, denies the critic access to such a totalizing vision, can be used to invoke the presence of this vision. From this point of view, a certain kind of theorizing operates on the model of Freudian denial. It posits the existence of the very object it rejects. Loss is recuperated in the act of its acknowledgement.

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Theory seems to function like this in *Interpreting Interpreting*. Certainly this would explain why, as I have said, no limited interpretation is ever allowed to develop without constantly being interrupted by repetitious theoretical statements which, despite their insistence on limitation, serve to keep the idea of the whole constantly before us. The image of the whole, the protean form of Dickens, is the real emotional center of this book, and Horton is never able to free herself from it enough to accept the necessity of restricted points of view or of the limitations of her own image as a critic.

Roy Roussel

State University of New York at Buffalo

Virginia Woolf by Michael Rosenthal. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979. Pp. 270. $15.00.

Any book written about Virginia Woolf these days is likely to be outmoded even before it reaches print. This is partly the case with Michael Rosenthal's recent study, which takes current feminist and biographical approaches to Woolf as the occasion to proclaim "primacy of form" as the key to her achievement. In 1977—while Rosenthal must have been slogging away on his closing chapters—Hermione Lee was employing the same rationale in the opening lines of her newly published *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*: "This is not a book about Bloomsbury, lebianism, madness or suicide. It does not deal with Virginia Woolf as a feminist, as an owner of the Hogarth Press, as a critic and essayist, or as a biographer. It is a literary criticism of her nine novels, written in the hope of turning attention back from the life to the fictional work. . . ."

Worse yet, Ms. Lee was also usurping his major thesis, his similar concentration on Woolf's "continuing attempt, in every new work, to match her vision of reality with its appropriate form." Rosenthal would go her three better, of course, by dealing with Woolf as a critic, essayist, and biographer as well as a novelist, on the valid premise that these activities also have their appropriate forms. But he would agree with her that "criticism of Virginia Woolf which is emphatically feminist cannot get very far with any of the fiction, except perhaps *Orlando*." In 1978, alas, a year after Lee published these remarks, and while Rosenthal was no doubt polishing the accepted version of his manuscript, Phyllis Rose got very far indeed, in *Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf*, with feminist readings of all the fiction. These readings were substantially more original, moreover, in opening up the feminist dimensions of each text, than those by Lee and Rosenthal—and decidedly more exciting.

Are formal readings of Woolf *passé*? Certainly with Woolf as with other major modern novelists we have had them *ad nauseum*. A list of critics who attempted them—and who invoke "primacy of form" in their behalf—would fill the rest of this review. What *is* new about Rosenthal's approach, let me accordingly add, is the doggedness and lucidity with which he pursues those diary entries about originating shapes, forms, designs (as opposed to characters or

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themes) from which the experimental works proceed. No previous study—not even Lee's—has followed these entries so tenaciously, nor explained their implications so precisely, nor made such an impressive case for their centrality as keys to her various artifacts. As I have implied, the readings arrived at are inevitably familiar; there is no plethora here of dazzling insights, no resolution of old cruxes: but the elegance and care with which the formal dynamics of each text are defined is altogether exemplary. No one in that imagined list above has done such justice to Woolf's formal intentions and their literary unfoldings.

To clear the way for that enterprise Rosenthal writes related chapters on Woolf's life, her Bloomsbury circle, and the problem of defining her fictional commitment. In the first chapter he tries to separate her literary legacy as Leslie Stephen's daughter and Thoby Stephen's sister from whatever might detract from it. The conversations among leading intellectuals in her childhood home, the great resources of her father's library, the circle of Cambridge intellectuals her brother brought to her in later years, become salient; and the early bouts with madness after crucial family deaths, her sexual exploitation by an older half-brother, her resentment of male privilege and male dominance, are seen as serious obstacles and conditions which, by 1922, when her great experimental period began, were either surmounted or subordinated or kept in tremulous abeyance. From that point on until her suicide in 1941 she lived chiefly in and through her writing, where her chief commitment—as the third chapter holds—was to design.

This view of her life and art suffers again from supercession; it fails to include some of her own revelations, available since 1976 in *Moments of Being*, which help to explain why her mother and half-sister Stella were at least as crucial to her literary development as her father and her brother Thoby. Though Rosenthal knows how such late-Victorian domestic "angels" figure in her later animosities, he doesn't see how they figure also in her selfless artistry and—paradoxically enough—in her selfless devotion to feminist causes. He arrives, then, at a curiously encapsulated life which leads—as we shall see—to a curiously encapsulated formal study.

The Bloomsbury chapter, which might have widened the study's scope, tends largely to preserve its narrow focus. Though Rosenthal is plainly enamored of Bloomsbury and feels at home in its heady environs, he dismisses its present standing as the precursor of contemporary liberations and defines it rather as a conservative enclave—rational, civilized, affluent—whose ethical and aesthetic concerns were essentially privileged. As he later shows, moreover, these same concerns—as reflected in Woolf's privileged life and art—would eventually appeal to "common readers" belonging to a similar class. Thus Bloomsbury becomes for Rosenthal a metaphor for his own and Virginia Woolf's readers, an educated, prosperous, and largely academic group in which current liberationists—if not excluded—are put in their properly subordinated places. The rescuing of Woolf from her present admirers takes a strange form, indeed, in this oddly regressive study of her designing ways.

But there is no gainsaying its dogged achievements. After dealing with Woolf's conventional realism in her first two novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, Rosenthal moves confidently to the elucidation of her first experimental

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novel, *Jacob's Room*. Through careful analysis, he isolates the different formal principles at work in the three experimental stories—"The Mark on the Wall," "Kew Gardens," and "An Unwritten Novel" which—Woolf had conceived as "taking hands and dancing in unity" to produce *Jacob's Room*; then he demonstrates how in fact these principles do work to unify that novel—which suffers nonetheless from heavyhanded explanations and uncertain narrative focus. Where Rosenthal moves nimbly and lucidly through these paces, producing what I take to be the best account of the novel's form extant, his predecessor Lee begins with the same three stories but quickly bogs down in the intricacies of verbal play. In general, she is more richly engaged with the novels than Rosenthal, but lacks his great gift for describing formal topographies.

Rosenthal's formal expertise works well on at least three more occasions: with the dubious "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse*, which I treat quite otherwise in *Criticism*, Winter 1979, but for which he supplies the best formal justification I have seen; with the somber distillations of inner essences in that stillborn classic, *The Waves*, which he unstintingly admires; and with the livelier uncertainties of *Between the Acts*, where again his reading ranks with the best we have. He is alert always to the author's concern with creative effort in the face of chaos, and to those globed "moments of being" which so many critics have remarked; he is alert to isolation and unity as constants in her fictive world, and to the coalescences of times past and present; and he is attentive, finally, to the social dimensions of her texts, to her feminism, her pacifism, her diatribes against conversion, her concern with sexual identity. Unfortunately, he is something less than alert to Woolf's personal stake in her own creative efforts, which may explain why his approach to these and other novels seems relatively shallow. As he himself observes of the pageant in *Between the Acts*: "What matters are not the merits of the play but the ongoing nature of the creative process itself .... Miss La Trobe's ability to continue in spite of the difficulties she faces constitutes a triumph of the spirit in which Woolf, in this novel, ultimately rests." Of course, the merits of Woolf's "plays" still matter; but since she also had to face ongoing difficulties throughout her career, and since Rosenthal sets them aside in his opening chapter, there is no triumph of the spirit in this study, nor of the spirit's changing forms.

We are not even told, for instance, that it was her shift of allegiance from Mansfield's external impressionism to Joyce's internal stream which helped her to solve her most glaring difficulty in *Jacob's Room*—her avoidance of inner life—in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her discovery of "her own voice" in the latter novel, her sudden access to "new maturity," comes *sui generis*, and Joyce is given no credit at all for showing her how the mind's quickness might be used in apprehending death, as in the cemetery scene in *Ulysses* she so admired. Nor is death itself seen as an ongoing problem with which she bravely wrestles in these novels; it is simply a local theme, handled flawlessly through appropriate forms. We do learn here that Mrs. Dalloway was originally intended to commit suicide; but Rosenthal never questions Woolf's motives in shifting that fate onto her hapless double, Septimus Warren Smith, nor in shifting the blame for it onto two complacent doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw, in whose excoriation Rosenthal sees "a splendid summary" of Bloomsbury's case against "a whole world

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view... which abhors diversity" and subdues people "to its own restricted premises." Woolf's easy victory over these cardboard villains, her failure to provide a burden of ungrieved grief and guilt for Mrs. Dalloway like that her double has to bear, the vicarious triumphs over the exigencies of sex and death she then provides for Mrs. Dalloway, go unexamined. In other words, Rosenthal accepts unquestioningly the author's intentions and their flawless execution in this novel—indeed, in all the novels after *Jacob's Room*. As a result, he fails to penetrate with any depth into the human problems Woolf explores; he simply demonstrates the technical excellence of her design and the kind of "substances" which yield most readily to them: the disconnectedness of modern life; the heroine's life-savoring absorptions; her vital presence; and those globed moments which, like other artist-heroines, she achieves as stays against confusion.

These are worthy subjects, in most cases admirably realized, but they scarcely exhaust the range and depth of Woolf's concern with human problems; nor does Rosenthal's approach seem especially sensitive to that rich concern. At one point, for instance, he claims that Lily Briscoe exists in *To the Lighthouse* "without any particular sexual role at all"; she "seems essentially neuter, indifferent to sexual needs of any sort"; her resentment of Mrs. Ramsay's insistence on marriage defines "no alternative set of yearnings. Sex simply plays no part in Lily's life." As any observant reader might reply, Rosenthal overlooks her intense desire to join in the search for Minta Doyle's brooch, her fascination with and repulsion from the fires of passion in Paul Rayley, the intensity of her bodily yearning for union with Mrs. Ramsay, and her fumbling attempt to recall the "electric thrill" of the Ramsays' marriage vow. Lily is less neuter, then, than bound by sexual tensions which she cannot resolve; and these tensions are further entwined with her whole attempt to make sense of the Ramsays' marriage, and of her own relation to them, and beyond that, with her curiously impacted grief for Mrs. Ramsay—an impaction shared with Woolf herself—on the release of which the completion of her painting seems to rest. Rosenthal's blindness to this network of intertwining feelings of confused love, frustrated passion, and blocked grief is more than a minor critical lapse: it is a blindness to the deeper sources of the novel's emotional power and to their origins in Woolf's personal dilemmas; a blindness, then, endemic to his method. As Woolf herself acknowledged, the writing of this novel released her from daily hallucinations of her parents' presence; it seems to have freed her, further, for the androgynous romp of *Orlando* and for her energetic feminist writings of the late 1920's and early 1930's. An unquestioning view of design and execution cannot explain such deeply personal triumphs.

Nor can it explain why the force of her release divided and thwarted her energies when she came to write *The Years* in the mid-1930's. Though Rosenthal bows to Mitchell Leaska's essay on *The Pargiters*, the early novel-essay version of *The Years* which appeared in 1977, he has obviously failed to read or account for the text itself. The energy and freedom of its alternation between fictional passages and didactic commentaries speaks eloquently, I think, to the forcefulness of Woolf's feminist anger at this time. Though Rosenthal pulls *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* into his purview as substantial works of art, treats *Three Guineas* as an effective (if assailable) moral tract, and reads

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Flush: A Biography as a playful feminist critique of Victorianism, he nowhere accepts Woolf's feminist convictions as sufficiently strong to split her intentions, challenge her belief in artistic autonomy, and move her, almost, to write a didactic novel. When she abandoned *The Pargiters* as too unwieldy, shelved its didactic chapters for later use in *Three Guineas*, and tried to aestheticize her convictions in *The Years*, she created the most tedious, labored, murky novel in her canon—as a great many critics have since attested. But for Rosenthal *The Years* is another flawless triumph. He does not see how her blunted feminist anger, together with the book's unmanageable scope and realistic densities, led to endless interchangeable instances of failed communications, dismal discontinuities, and lifeless verbal resonances. Indeed, he doesn't even acknowledge that Woolf herself dismissed this "odious rice pudding of a book" as "a dank failure" and denied its autonomy by lumping it with *Three Guineas* "as one book"—as if still trying to rescue her abandoned novel-essay plan.

By his concluding chapter, however, Rosenthal has moved onto safer ground. After defining Woolf's impressionistic criticism as essentially old-fashioned, and her modernist pleading as essentially self-serving, he establishes the privileged social position from which such writing proceeds; and here his argument, that in her criticism at least she was not a radical social thinker, strikes me as well taken. But her criticism is not her fiction, and when Rosenthal claims that we must accept the fact of her privileged social stance "if we are –to appreciate her work in its totality," he merely describes his own privileged approach. Yet plainly he does appreciate that totality, and is past master of its formal principles and enlivening designs. Readers will go to his book for these salient virtues for some time to come, and that too—for the critical spirit—is a worthy triumph.

MARK SPILKA

Brown University

The Language of Puritan Feeling: An Exploration in Literature, Psychology, and Social History by David Leverenz. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980. Pp. xi + 346. $22.00.

The New Englanders created the West, wrote Jorge Luis Borges, and so we study the Puritans to death in order to understand how we live. Though we already know more about the Puritans than any sane person would want to know, as Edmund Morgan once said, we continue to worry that 200-year bulge in history which they made, for we never seem to be quite sure we have got it right. And that has been one of the opportunities of studying the period: it is a field for intellectual experimentation.

One of the inadvertent pleasures of the literary and historical studies of early America has been the relative absence of Freud. One could *assume* the general insanity and go on to more important matters! Now David Leverenz, encouraged by Norman O. Brown, Erik Erikson, and other neo-Freudians, lays these beautifully demented souls out on an imaginary historical couch for

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elaborate psychoanalysis. And while the methodology is disgraceful ("to use literature to apply psychoanalytic theory to social psychology"), the results are enlightening. One is almost seduced by the experiment, if mainly because of *their* talent at interesting and entertaining us.

Freud, Leverenz fantasizes, invented the Puritans. Theirs was A Family Romance—at home, in the new society, and in a dramatic cosmos—in which thousands of sons reacted ambivalently towards thousands of fathers whose traditional roles were threatened by new social discontents and so turned for tender mothering and grave fathering to The True Father, the Puritan God. These are the "anal dynamics" of early America.

In New England, male roles ("reserved or anxious fathering") and female roles ("good though demanding mothering") widened, and this left all the Puritan children full of "reaction formations" and "a conscious dedication to anxiety" and "obsessional neuroses [that] reflect infantile internalization of patriarchal repression." Thus "their hunger for comprehensive patterns" and "their hunger for more specifically regressive pleasures." Which anxieties, however, Leverenz struggles to assure us, they turned into virtues. Puritan frustrations turned (with Freud winking approvingly in the wings) into American productivity. "If all they could be sure of was anxiety, that was to them a profoundly comforting thought." Not a happy state, though often a creative one.

The Puritan sons' expectations of the fathers were impossibly high in America and got mixed results—ambivalence in an age of dislocation. The failure of the fathers led to insecurity in the sons, a set of ambivalences which led to opposites in the ethics and theology. Yet secure families led to stable communities and to universal securities. The subsuming of many conflicts in the expectation of order became—God knows how!—the transient genius of Puritanism.

However, Leverenz' drama of Puritanism ("a confluence of two contradictory modes of literary expression: nursing fantasies and obsessive styles") is simply on too small a stage: the domestic. And while that may have been a dominant metaphor in the sermons of the time (the family as "a little commonwealth"), that hardly represents all that was going on in mind and body in that period. Other analogies work as well and say as little. Leverenz does not see that Puritanism, like Freudianism, was built on analogies that broke down in their own minds and break down in ours. That saved it.

At one point in his arrangement of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ideologies and conflicts into a Freudian pattern, Leverenz commits an anachronism which gives him away: "Children were thought of as both more and less than little adults, some of our current theories to the contrary, and Puritans were especially sensitive to parental responsibilities." What are "current theories" doing in *that* period? Can syntax thus convincingly accomplish the proximity of centuries?

It is only by a rhetorical strategy of implicit polarity that Leverenz resolves the contradictions he finds in early America. But that takes skill at equivocation. And that is dishonest. Contradictory sexual imagery in the descriptions of God, for instance, does not mean the Puritans were ambivalent about their relation to God. The mixed metaphors are mixed metaphors, not mixed feelings. The equivocations are fun, as when Leverenz calls God and Christ "a fantasy

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of mutual dependence between consenting adults" or speaks of grown Puritan men with "feminine and infantile fantasies," but they are hardly enlightening about an age that had no such concepts. The critic overreacheth—to say old things in hip ways.

Two major flaws make Leverenz' book fascinating. There is the flaw of the psychoanalyst: he actually takes these people *seriously*. And there is the flaw of the literary critic: *texts* are the truth.

Leverenz the therapist doesn't distinguish between what in Puritan rhetoric is a revealing slip and what is merely flip. John Cotton's reference to himself as the breast of God in one of his sermons, for example, doesn't necessarily mean he is ambivalent about his masculinity, his patriarchal authority. It probably means he has read his Bible and has simply found a metaphor he can use to show his joy in being a minister. Besides, if you put his analogy back into its context in his sermon, you find that it hardly matters what he has at that point as long as it makes his point. This metaphor, and hundreds of others like it, is used initially, Leverenz admits, "for purposes of analogy" but soon is taken seriously when the analogue justifies the Freudian-Puritan model.

Leverenz the literary critic, while admitting the annoying paucity of texts to tell us anything very conclusive about the Puritan mind, treats his few like holy scriptures, seeking "the emotional sources of Puritan rhetoric" in "great writers, our psychic barometers." In other words, lacking bodies, he analyzes words and deduces the whole thrust of a society therefrom, forgetting how many other factors, artful and otherwise, made it. For him, the rhetoric of the period is "a self-referential system," a "transformational mirror for social history, especially for shared feelings." Leverenz discusses no more than a dozen New England sons and no more than three or four works of each. But did that handful really represent all of *that* or make all of *this?* With Leverenz, it is a temptation to say yes, because of the slick correspondence with mythic Freudian patterns which he is able to make. But it is probably better to say an emphatic no, because we can't *know*, we can only guess. Leverenz too is only guessing!

Leverenz' mind is one that one must admire: immensely wide reading, a sweeping eye, a lively style, fresh examples, and acutely fine comments on the literary styles of "diverse fathers" like Thomas Hooker, John Cotton, Thomas Shepard, and "divergent sons" like Increase Mather and Samuel Willard. But Leverenz' book is one that one must simply forgive. It is a frivolous experiment.

Karl Keller

San Diego State University

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Home as Found: Authority and Geneology in Nineteenth-Century American Literature by Eric I. Sundquist. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xxi + 209. $15.00.

In this study of Cooper, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville, Eric Sundquist examines a preoccupation of nineteenth-century American literature that has already received a good deal of attention: the conflict between originality and imitation, between revolutionary rejections of the past and appeals or capitulations to its authority. But while the approach of such "classic" predecessors as F. O. Matthiessen and Marius Bewley was at heart social or political, Sundquist understands originality and imitation first of all in psychoanalytic terms. "The model for the conflicts under examination," he writes, "is the sacrificial totem meal Freud finds so strikingly fused with the Oedipal situation," in which "ritual remembrance of the [Oedipal] crime unnervingly augments the slain father's power at the same time it celebrates the seizure of that power" (xvii, xiii).

This is not to say that Sundquist is narrowly or exclusively concerned with psychology. The totem meal, and the ambivalence Freud found in it, are for him paradigmatic of a whole series of congruent tensions, ranging from matters of political authority to questions of authorial legitimacy. In Cooper's *Home as Found*, for instance, the attempt "to found an American home by incest and repetition" (36) is related both to Cooper's politics and to the function of imitation and parody in his writing. Thoreau's *Week* is read as a paradoxical and self-contradictory "retreat away from the speculative web of reference and inference" (54) spun by consciousness and language. In Hawthorne Sundquist finds a primal "*sacrifice of mimesis*," forcing such works as *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* to become "head-on confrontations with the problem of representation" (122, 126). And Melville's *Pierre* enacts "a point of crisis figuring authority at an impotent crossroads where the struggle [between rebellion and capitulation] is so internalized that it can generate only a wild, self-reflexive parody" (146). These brief summaries can hardly do justice to the dense (sometimes overly dense) complexity of Sundquist's argument. But they may at least suggest that his psychoanalytic focus does not prevent him from exploring such "literary" questions as the function of parody and, in Hawthorne's case, the elusive definition of "romance."

Sundquist insists that his use of Freud is not "clinical" but "cultural." He disclaims any desire to reduce creative power to neurotic symptom; he uses Freud, he says, not to *explain* but to *define* "the scenes of crisis that compel some of the best American literature of the nineteenth century" (xvii). While this approach may offend the strict Freudian it will probably please those who find psychoanalytic criticism reductive. But even the non-Freudian may find Sundquist's disclaimer an evasion, and find its results unsettling. This "cultural" Freudianism leaves important theoretical questions unanswered. The asserted relationship of Freud to the texts under discussion is mainly analogical: we are told, for instance, that a statement of Freud "corresponds closely" (100) to a belief of Hawthorne; that while "original sin" may not *be* the "primal scene," nevertheless "the two equally hypothetical moments have a similar force" (103); or simply that there is a "weird coincidence" (104) between an aspect of

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Hawthorne and an idea of Freud. What is missing here is an asserted *explanation* of such "coincidences." As a result Sundquist's "cultural" Freudianism tends to come unmoored from any precisely defined sense of actual cultural interaction. The "coincidence" or "similarity" linking Freud to the works under discussion often seems little more than an elaborate pun. This charge might not bother an author who can describe *Pierre*, for instance, as "a 'Pierrody' and 'Pierricide' of itself" (184). But one expects more solid grounding from a book which appeals to Freud as "cultural historian" (xvii).

Nevertheless, whatever one's theoretical reservations about it might be, Sundquist's psychoanalytic approach has real practical value. His use of Freud's totem meal as analogical model yields an insight into the theme of rebellion and authority unavailable in more traditional, "political" approaches to the subject. In the work of critics like Matthiessen and Bewley the antagonism between rebellion and tradition is a contest, however internalized by specific characters, between separate forces or ideologies. What Freud contributes to Sundquist's understanding of this contest is not only the notion of ambivalence but the idea that "devotion and rebellion" may be welded "inextricably together" (xi) *in the same gesture*, including the gesture of the author's own literary performance. This insight permits us to see a crucial connection between the theme and form of the works under discussion. The literary analogue to the totem meal is parody; "*imitation*," as Sundquist puts it, "must always entertain the eventuality that it be taken as both obedience and mockery" (171-72) of the object it burlesques.

Thus in Cooper's *Home as Found* the Effinghams' effort to assert legitimacy by "echoing and plagiarizing" the past "at once constitutes an inviolable authority and threatens to collapse into itself" (39); and Cooper's analogous effort, as son and author, leads him "to the point of self-parody" (25). Thoreau's attempt in the *Week* to write "the myth of America" is simultaneously a "commemorative act" and a parodic repetition of what it seeks to strip away—an imitative "commerical intrusion in which the white man's 'load of thought' further buries that which it would recover" (81). Hawthorne's "Eden" of pure mimesis "constantly collapses under the pressure of [that] perception" (110) which, in seeking to revive it, only imitates its original loss. In such a view, the tradition of nineteenth-century American literature quite naturally culminates in the "wild, self-reflexive parody" (146) of *Pierre*, whose hero is "at home" only in the role and the words of his patriarchal past.

Some readers will object to Sundquist's psychoanalytic approach, either because they find it too strict or because they find it, theoretically, too loose. Some may be put off, and not without reason, by the arch density of his prose. Yet his book is still an original and useful contribution, particularly to our understanding of the stylistic and formal consequences of the obsession with authority in the literature of the American Renaissance.

Michael Davitt Bell

Williams Colllege

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The Creation of Nikolai Gogol by Donald Fanger. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. xviii + 300. $16.50.

It is fitting that Donald Fanger's outstanding study on Gogol bear a punning title in the spirit of its whimsical object of study. "Creation" here can of course be understood as one possible translation of the standard Russian title for monographs on authors, i.e. "tvorcestvo" (works). Of more concern to Fanger is the second reading of "creation" in the sense of a verbal noun, the process of Gogol's creation of himself, or as Fanger terms it, "Gogol's stey-by-step self-improvisation as a writer" (ix). Again in Gogolian spirit, Fanger's thesis—and this is very much a work of thesis, *not* synthesis—might be couched in the following paradox: Gogol attempted through his creativity to fill a vacuum with a void and thereby fill the latter. The "vacuum" in this paradox is the absence of a Russian prose tradition when Gogol began writing in the late 1820's; the "void," the absence of the usual author's biography which Gogol, in person as elusive as in his texts, took great pains to obscure. In Gogol's case the separation of author from text is no modern critical posture; Fanger's well-taken point is that we really have no Gogol other than his texts. And the texts point nowhere but to themselves, an assortment of elusive narrators, voices, denials and characters that prove upon examination to be "bare verbal tissue" (259). As Fanger sums up the problem of text and referrent in Gogol: "This ultimate paradox of literary art is Gogol's fundamental message. The rest is implication—and of the most various sorts: Psychological, social, ethical, religious—all encoded, demonstrably and at the same time incompletely, in the texts" (259). These latter incidentally have provided the basis for traditional approaches to Gogol from Belinsky to the present day.

In focusing on the literary problems confronting Gogol, Fanger provides a much needed reminder of Gogol's acute awareness of the literary scene of his time and of the special role he felt it was destiny to play in Russian Literature. Briefly stated, Gogol saw his role to be for Russian prose what Pushkin was for Russian poetry. Fanger emphatically agrees that Gogol's was the first authentic national voice in prose; he "broke the language barrier" (235), as Sinyavsky puts it, and created Russian prose out of the spoken language(s) of his day. This parallelism between Pushkin and Gogol Fanger sees culminating in each author's greatest works, *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin's novel in verse, and *Dead Souls*, Gogol's prose *poema*. Both are sustained acts of poetic discourse, compendia of observation, commentary, confession, imagination with tones varying from burlesque through the lyrical to the solemn, with primacy of author as creator (151-2).

As mentioned, Fanger's study is one of thesis, and therein the reader must be cautioned. Although the book is intended for specialists and non-specialists alike, one will not find extensive retracking of familiar Gogolian landscape such as *poshlost*, *skaz*, "nosology," realized metaphor, hyperbole and like. Fanger assumes close familiarity with the texts, the major critics on Gogol and the general outlines of the development of Russian Literature. Gogol's works are analyzed only to the extent dictated by the thesis. Particularly refreshing is Fanger's acceptance of the miracle and mystery of Gogol's achievement. His

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frank admission of the difficulties and dangers of interpreting Gogol is also bound to be heartening for students of Gogol. But for a study whose thesis is that content is *in* the form (235) or as stated in another place, "the bedrock allegory of Gogol's art... concerns the miracle and meaning of its own existence" (261), there is a curious absence of extensive discussion about Gogol's ultimate miracle, his language.

Fanger's study abounds in wonderful insights into many of Gogol's works, which will provide great stimulus to further study. But the one immediate, immense benefit of Fanger's approach is that it does what no "committed" approach can, simply make possible a reading of Gogol; that is, it not only makes permissible an eclectic approach to the works, it virtually insists upon it. The responsibility for the reader is to explore *all* the encoded implications (social, psychological or otherwise) of a Gogol text. As he concludes in his remarks on "The Overcoat," this sort of analysis entails "a respect for the idiosyncracy of the form that allows full appreciation of the capaciousness of Gogol's story, its legitimate transcendence of singleness of message..." (161).

Frank J. Corliss, Jr.

Wayne State University

Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry During the 1960s by Charles Altieri. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1979. Pp. 258. $17.50.

Current studies of contemporary American poetry locate their subject somewhere within a historical continuum that extends—so elastic has the term "contemporary" become—from the end of World War II to the present moment. Given the variousness, the sheer breadth, of the work done in poetry during these three and a half decades, it is not surprising that we should find rather different versions of what constitutes it, depending on where the critic cuts into the period or simply on what writers he chooses to deal with. Understandably, there have been few attempts to account for everything. Most critics forego extensive coverage in order to focus on themes, issues, or coherent groupings of writers. Yet few confront the problem of literary change in terms other than the stylistic and the rhetorical, and few look beyond a merely temporal understanding of what is "contemporary" about poetry during this long (and lengthening) period.

What is immediately striking about Charles Altieri's important book, then, particularly at a time when the whole notion of periodization is being called into question, is the fact that it focuses on the poetry of a single decade, that of the 1960s, and views it as a coherent, historical whole. One obvious advantage of this approach is that it allows Altieri to avoid some of the risks inherent in any criticism of contemporary literature—primarily the risk of attempting to evaluate the careers of writers still actively productive. More important, it frees him to regard the poetry as a distinct and separate historical achievement,

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without necessary connection to its continuities with work beyond the decade. In this sense, the poetry of the sixties is not contemporary for Altieri; it is comprised instead of a relatively fixed body of strategies, values, and styles that are seen as having arisen out of particular historical needs and that have now been absorbed into the general repertoire of literary models available to still newer writers. The great value of the book lies in its rigorously theoretical and philosophical definition of those historical needs and its precise placement of them in the larger context of literary and philosophical change extending back through modernism to the Romantics.

Altieri's term for the period is "postmodern," which in his usage is not simply a voguish replacement for contemporary or a gesture in the direction of Derridean "free play," but a sharply specific way of referring to the struggles of poets in the sixties to surpass the assumptions and values of some of the most powerful poetry of the twentieth century, that of the generation of Yeats and Eliot. What motivated this undertaking, moreover, was not just an anxiety of influence but a recognition of the need for new models of the poem at a time when poets were growing increasingly suspicious of the prophetic claims of the symbolist tradition and of the academic formalism, fostered by New Criticism, that represented a diluted, if elegant, continuation of that tradition. In Altieri's view, poets in the sixties, precisely because of their historical circumstances, as well as their sense of the inadequacy of forms and values inherited from modernism to newer versions of experience, were forced to reinterpret modernist positions on a variety of issues—including the relationship of concrete particulars to universals, the role of the self in the poetic process, language, myth, and the social functions of poetry. They had to invent, in short, a "coherent philosophical poetics" of their own to accommodate axiological and epistemological orientations beyond the scope of modernism. The chief result was what he calls an "aesthetic of presence," or immanence, involving the conviction, traced back to the early Wordsworth, that "experience has value without the artist intervening to rearrange and structure it." As the basic tenet of Altieri's version of postmodernism, this aesthetic of presence is opposed to Coleridgean symbolist theories that give primacy to the creative role of consciousness or mind as the source of value in art and that stand behind modernist poetics. Thus the task of the poet is no longer to impose himself on experience and wrest meaning from it, transforming it into myth with universal human implications, but to open himself to the values and energies already immanent in nature or experience and disclose them through the verbal energies of the poem.

Altieri's argument, even in this bare, oversimplified sketch of it, seems to rest on two essential and related claims. One is that the change from symbolist to immanentist modes of poetic thought constitutes a historical pattern or context in which a fairly diverse group of poets can be accurately located, and the other is that the poets themselves have indeed worked out, no matter how consciously or systematically, a coherent poetics of their own as an alternative to modernism. This second claim is apparently complicated by the fact that some of the poets he deals with—Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov, for example—have addressed themselves to poetic theory in substantial ways, while some of the others—Robert Lowell, W. S. Merwin, Frank

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O'Hara—have been comparatively silent about theory or even hostile to it. But this complication is quickly disposed of by Altieri's basic assumption as a critic—that literary style itself necessarily has philosophical implications—while his close readings of texts in the light of this assumption demonstrate the extent to which poems themselves are often the best manifestation of their underlying poetics. In fact, one of the best sections in the book, on the poetry of O'Hara, suggests (especially if it is compared with the rather more densely abstract discussions of Olson and Duncan) that the absence of explicit theory from a poet's work is not necessarily a deprivation for the critic seeking the most direct apprehension of his poetry.

In dealing with his first claim, Altieri offers, in an ambitious and suggestive first chapter, "a logical geography mapping the internal relationships among various postmodern positions on the nature of the poetic imagination, the relationship between the mind and nature or objects, and the ways poetry can deal with mythic, historical, and social themes in order to dramatize the importance of values radically different from the essential conservatism of the modernists." Starting with Coleridge and Wordsworth, who provide the fundamental models of thought informing modernism and postmodernism respectively, Altieri's intention here is to develop the range of differences that distinguish poets who stress the creativity of mind from those who emphasize natural law as a creative source, as in Robert Duncan's well-known distinction between "the order man may contrive or impose upon the things about him" and "the divine order or natural order he may discover in them." The rest of the book, five extended chapters, is devoted to showing the variety of forms assumed by the basic attitudes of postmodernism in the careers of individual poets, including the specifically poetic forms and styles to which these attitudes lead. The following poets or groups of poets are dealt with: Robert Lowell; Robert Bly, Charles Olson, and Frank O'Hara; Gary Snyder and Robert Duncan; Robert Creeley and W. S. Merwin; and Denise Levertov. As a version of the poetry of the sixties, this selection will not satisfy everyone, biased as it is toward poets associated with Black Mountain or Donald Allen's anthology, *The New American Poetry*. In its defense, one might say that Altieri, who is largely indifferent to schools and labels, is not merely writing about poets he admires; in each case, his choice is more or less dictated by the demands of his "logical geography," his theoretical map of the period. One might also say that any theoretical construct that provides terms in which both Robert Lowell and Charles Olson can be discussed as inhabitants of the same literary time and place has much to recommend it. In certain ways, in fact, Lowell and Olson, despite the incompatibility of the "schools" to which they are usually assigned—confessional and projectivist—emerge for Altieri as the two major figures of the age—Lowell as the greatest poet and Olson as the most important theorist.

Lowell is considered first because he best exemplifies both the need to escape modernism and the difficulty of doing so. His break, in *Life Studies*, from the New Critical formalism of his own earlier work helps to explain the limits of that style and dramatizes the need for a new mode that will be more in touch with the direct experience of a naturalistic "prose world," a world in which experience is conceived as process and in which value is immanent, not transcen-

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dent. Thus Lowell's poetry shifts radically from the tightly structured, epiphanic, densely symbolic forms of *Lord Weary's Castle* to the looser, more open forms of his later books which "appear," Altieri shrewdly observes, "to remain faithful to the casual flux of experience." What Lowell's career demonstrates is not only an increasing commitment to an aesthetic of presence but a pattern of conversion that is exemplary for the sixties, involving a movement away from the universalizing, myth-making, form-giving imagination to a position more immediately and directly in the world, so that familiar realities can be recovered as valuable in themselves, not as elements in a symbolic order whose value depends on their incarnational force. Yet Lowell is ultimately a tragic figure for Altieri because his commitment to immanence or flux is incomplete and always attended by a sense of loss. Although his later work is based on the conviction that we are "only in touch with what we touch," Lowell cannot give up what he nonetheless no longer trusts without nostalgia, a kind of Arnoldian longing for discredited historical and cultural ideals that arouses, Altieri claims, the suspicions of younger contemporaries who are less ambiguously disenchanted with history. But one wonders if Lowell is so completely isolated and without influence as this account, moving as it is, suggests. Or is this simply a minor instance of Altieri's "logical geography" leading him to overstate his case, and thus to expose the extent to which that geography is a version of literary history whose explanatory power depends as much on what it excludes (those poets, for example, who value Lowell's work) as on what it reveals (the paths pursued by other poets consciously attempting a more complete break with humanist values)?

What is most important in this discussion, in any case, is Altieri's insistence that for all the appearance of casualness and contingency in Lowell's poetry, it is in fact in the process of discovering or appropriating conventions whereby it continues to generate interpretative patterns or structures that make possible the emergence of generalized perspectives on experience. This is especially true in *Life Studies*, where concrete images or incidents in individual poems acquire larger significance as they are absorbed into patterns in the volume as a whole. Thus, as a theorist of a poetics of immanence or presence, Altieri stops short of J. Hillis Miller's position in *Poets of Reality*, where, in advancing a similar poetics, Miller claims that a poet like Williams achieves an unmediated apprehension of the world, the poem as the thing itself. In the aesthetic of presence, Altieri points out, "poems do not present direct experience but the aesthetic illusion of direct experience that depends on style and form as means for seeing the world freshly."

All the poets Altieri examines after his treatment of Lowell represent a variety of positions and attitudes within the full context of the aesthetic of presence. The work of Bly, Olson, and O'Hara offers three distinct but related ways of moving beyond Lowell's despairing nostalgia for humanism, based on the idea that "the moment immediately and intensely experienced can restore one to harmony with the world and provide ethical and psychological renewal." Then Snyder and Duncan are presented as essentially religious poets with few doubts about their faith in the satisfactions to be derived from the fullness of ongoing experience, or "process as plenitude." It is precisely this faith that Creeley and Merwin, however, cannot summon, and they serve Altieri

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as instances of a more skeptical and ironic attitude toward the immanentist imperative, "be here intensely." This attitude, moreover, is based on a radical awareness of the inadequacy of experiences of presence that are simply not abiding or that do not somehow take account of their opposite, experiences of absence.

On the whole, these chapters constitute the best criticism of these poets that we have had. Altieri is able to place them within his historical and theoretical context and provide richly detailed accounts of their work, and one must be grateful for the tremendous sense he has been able to make of a period that up to now has often seemed to be dizzyingly varied, a welter of styles, forms, schools, and attitudes with little if anything in common. Despite this, he seems to me to be less than entirely successful in his sections on Olson and Duncan, in the sense that his discussions of their work sometimes exhibit nearly the same degree of difficulty that their work itself does, and so readers who find these poets turgidly involuted or esoterically involved with their own private visions may not be encouraged to persist with them by Altieri's corresponding density. In the section on Olson in particular, I found myself wishing for less theory and for a greater focus on poetry, especially given the extent to which, as Altieri shows, Olson's value as a writer lies in his conscious efforts to extend the boundaries of the lyric and to push toward the epic—a push demanded by all the implications of his thought. The one poem by Olson discussed, "Variations Done for Gerald Van de Wiele," is dealt with beautifully, but as Altieri himself admits, it is "essentially a pastoral poem in the Romantic meditative mode," and as such it cannot exemplify the fullest reach of Olson's thinking as it emerges in the discussion. In fact, Altieri's almost exclusive orientation toward the lyric may be a limitation, since one imagines that attention to larger forms, particularly in the work of a poet like Olson, might have necessitated some qualification of the claims made for the aesthetic of presence as a definitive concept for the period. The lyric, after all, has traditionally been the most fundamental form in which to address a present moment of intense experience, and Olson clearly grew impatient with conventional notions of lyricism, or at least with what he regarded as its inherent subjective interference with the perceptual act. For these reasons, despite the degree to which most modern poems approximating epic shy away from narrative, one wonders how far an aesthetic of presence can support an epic ambition—a poem, as Pound defined it, including history. On the other hand, it seems equally clear that Olson's *Maximus*, whose postmodernism might best be defined by the way it includes not history per se but its own history, continues itself to be governed largely by lyric procedures, Olson's redefinition of such procedures notwithstanding.

On the general issue of limitations—not of the poets but of the aesthetic of presence itself—Altieri provides a final chapter, and it is the most problematic of the book. He deals here with Denise Levertov, but his interest is less in her work, which he sees as a fairly standard version of immanentist poetry, than in her discovery of the inappropriateness of her poetics to the ethical and public themes occasioned by the Vietnam War. In pursuing this interest, Altieri deviates sharply from the structure of his earlier chapters, which are all balanced and developmental considerations of the work of one or more poets, and

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engages new themes in a way that dilutes or at least complicates the thrust of his book. His concern now is to raise questions about the philosophical adequacy of postmodernism from the perspective of its failures with social and political issues, and his argument, taking a series of jarring twists and turns, leads him first to congratulate Levertov for arriving at a crucial awareness of the insufficiency of her immanentist stance—oriented as it is toward particular and personal experiences of presence—in a time of political turmoil. But she is then criticized harshly not only for the poverty of her methods of accommodating larger issues but for her failure to avail herself of models and traditions that might provide the greater discursiveness and generalizing ability required by a style seeking, in Altieri's words, "to formulate an ethic and an aesthetic that might help restructure the consciousness of society." The lapses in this phase of Levertov's work, as Altieri demonstrates them, are clear, but what seems less than fair is the way she is made to bear the brunt of the attack here for problems endemic to postmodern poetics in general and thus potentially to most of the poets with whom Altieri deals.

It is then somewhat ironic that the alternative models and traditions Altieri has in mind for Levertov are those of modernism—ironic because so much of the book is devoted to showing why poets of the sixties could not accept modernist procedures. Yet even though these procedures are capable, as he suggests (without full demonstration), of generating a valuable public poetry, Altieri goes on to acknowledge that "no poetry is likely to have much direct impact on the social order." His concern, then, is that poetry not be "embarrassingly simplistic," regardless of its political or ethical effectiveness. Its value is essentially aesthetic, or that of an act of mind, and even modernism, for all the nobility of its efforts to work out a viable relationship between the poet and society, did not and perhaps could not wholly succeed in the public realm. But how satisfied, one must ask, would Levertov have been with an appeal to aesthetics in the midst of her urgent attempts to end the war? Though Altieri distinguishes between poetry and politics as modes of consciousness and action respectively, is it not precisely impatience with this kind of dichotomy, and with the resulting divorce between thought and action, that prompted the various breaks with modernism in the sixties?

Despite these difficulties of his last chapter—difficulties of tone and sheer haste more than actual content—it is a mark of Altieri's originality and energy as a critic that he does not simply let the entire matter rest by offering one more example of the aesthetic of presence—even one which happens to turn against itself critically out of frustration with its inability to engage social and political themes. Instead, Levertov's crisis provides him with an opening for a general discussion of "the limitations of all modern political poetry" and an opportunity to reconsider modernism in the light of its relatively greater achievement in this area. Moreover, in concluding with what must be regarded as a resuscitation of modernism in a book otherwise devoted to what replaces it historically, Altieri suggests that literary history is not simply progressive or developmental but, as he puts it in an interesting note, "a kind of differential field in which there is no progress, only a series of permutations and oppositions that sustain one another." The danger, of course, is that he is throwing his book off balance,

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as well as undermining its teleological design, by introducing new themes and an altered perspective at the very end. One requires a little reminding, after this last table-turning chapter, that Altieri's basic argument, after all, concerns the success of the poets of the sixties in finding alternatives to modernism.

Robert Kern

Boston College

Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature by Frank McConnell. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. Pp. xv + 303. $13.95.

Frank McConnell's *Storytelling and Mythmaking* violates the sacred cows of many academic *cinestes*, but those who would be horrified by his methodology and his results are unlikely to read this review, much less understand what McConnell has to say. McConnell assumes a sophisticated, literate (books and films) audience, and plunges ahead without shame into an investigation of the roots of storytelling common to both literature and film. His book is both the presentation of a critical approach and an interpretive application of that approach. The title is accurate: he is concerned with the juncture of storytelling *and* mythmaking as they are imagined in film *and* literature. His process is synthetic and, quietly, syncretic.

McConnell is mercifully direct and clear about his critical tastes and premises: "This book is about film and literature as kinds of storytelling. It argues that stories matter, and matter deeply, because they are the best way to save our lives." He goes on to say that vicariously playing the hero of stories "...is still the best version of 'self-help' our civilization has invented." Consequently, anyone who looks at the title and glances at the first page has a pretty good idea of the critical precepts informing what follows. McConnell then deals with the relationships of both film and writing to storytelling. But his task in the first few pages is to make the reader aware of his views on these issues, to make clear the premises from which all else will follow. Avoiding the polemical traps of so many other writers on film and literature, McConnell explains only what the reader needs to know to grapple with the ideas of *this* book. After giving the reader enough to grasp his critical premises, he sets out on his real chore.

That chore is a worthwhile one: to reconsider Northrop Frye's notions of the relationships between stories and mythic patterns. McConnell summarizes Frye's ideas and acknowledges his debts to Frye for illuminating the importance of archetypes and the great cycle of stories. McConnell rightly sees his reconsideration of Frye's work as "...more a matter of focus than of field." McConnell then examines a central part of Frye's system (one which has always bothered me as well): Frye's temporal basis for the cycles of storytelling. In Rousseau's *The Social Contract* McConnell finds a set of principles which solve the problems of Frye's system by allowing "...us to see how the archetypes themselves are present, at any given stage of history, within a single phase of civilization."

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Rousseau points out four types of law (i. e. determinants of the relationships of individuals to each other and to the state) which adapt nicely to the numerical morphology of archetypal critics: laws establishing order in a society; laws setting forth the ways in which people relate to each other (civil laws); laws defining crimes (and therefore punishments); and finally the the "laws" of conscience—what human beings simply know to be right and just. McConnell adapts Rousseau's ideas to a four-cycle division of story forms similar to that offered by Frye, with types of laws becoming the archetypal foundations of various story forms. The four literary forms are, predictably (I mean that in a positive sense), epic, romance, melodrama, and satire.

The remainder of the introduction defines the four kinds of stories. The epic is a tale of beginnings whose hero, a king, incarnates and imposes a code of myth (i. e. political law) on a city (culture) he founds. Thus the hero initiates what becomes the normative basis for a society. The romance begins with a culture whose primary laws (the guiding principles provided by the king of the epic) have already been established. The king therefore recedes into the background and the figure of the knight becomes prominent. His mission is to make the life of the culture tolerable (rather than to establish any principles); consequently, the knight focuses on training the citizens of the culture to observe basic codes of behavior.

Eventually, however, the culture becomes increasingly corrupt, ushering in a new kind of "hero," a descendant of the knight, who tries to restore the culture to its original principles; McConnell calls this figure the "pawn." The hero of melodrama moves through a corrupt culture; the city (the culture) is itself the problem and no longer the end worth establishing and building as in the first two movements of the cycle. For McConnell, such a world is best characterized by the qualities of the detective—a man who is both victim yet somewhat able to affect his culture (or at least a segment of it).

As the hero of melodrama becomes increasingly disenchanted, the cycle moves on to satire. The city is a place no longer worth saving, nor can the hero find in it the detective's remnants of honor. The satirist is so surrounded by corruption that he can only look inward to discover truly moral laws and, using those laws imbedded in the human heart, attack the corruption of the culture in hopes of demolishing and (re)establishing the principles which would begin the cycle again.

The pattern is one which is both convincing and useful, and McConnell moves on in the succeeding chapters to show how the pattern illuminates individual texts. In doing so, McConnell strains at times to balance his attention to both film and literature. Literature obviously offers the most fertile ground for studying epic. McConnell casts about for films which have epic concerns, spending time on films such as THE SANDS OF IWO JIMA and THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (which he aptly dismisses). Finally, *The Iliad*, *the Aeneid*, and *Beowulf* are examined next to IVAN THE TERRIBLE, INTOLERANCE, and MAN OF ARAN. While the three films support McConnell's thesis, they seem woefully mismatched against such literary giants. (I have no better suggestions, however. Ours is scarcely an age of epic. One wonders whether the present sense of apocalypse will turn full circle to soon produce genuine epics for our culture.)

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McConnell's ideas become more interesting and more pressing to me when he enters the world of romance. While the knight and the western hero have been juxtaposed before, McConnell's perspective on the juxtaposition is interesting and informative. And while we may have some difficulty today with notions of establishing a culture, we have no difficulty with works presenting the tension between chaos and culture, between the heart of darkness and civilization. McConnell moves easily from traditional literature to contemporary film in this section: *Sir Gawain*, *Lancelot*, *The Song of Roland* and St. Paul's epistles help illuminate THE PRISONER OF ZENDA, RED RIVER, MY DARLING CLEMENTINE, and PATTON.

As we move into the world of melodrama, we keep moving toward a view of society more immediately recognizable. The world of melodrama is the world of pawns, a world in which people have increasingly lost their vision of the founding principles. In the western, for example, the transformation to melodrama can be seen in heroes who attempt to sustain personal ethics in a culture which no longer respects the values of the traditional western hero. But McConnell suggests that the key figure in melodrama is the detective—the man who works along in a morass of corruption, maintaining (albeit cynically) a personal code of honor. Money or matters of property are the central issue for stories in this part of the cycle, and the detective is the person who quests for information about such issues. While traditional literary works are given front stage in the section on epic and middle stage in romance, the balance shifts in the section on melodrama. Films like THE BIG SLEEP, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, CITIZEN KANE, THE LAST LAUGH, NORTH BY NORTHWEST, LITTLE CAESAR, and THE GODFATHER dominate a consideration which also includes Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Franz Kafka.

Similarly, cinema dominates the section on satire, although McConnell carefully covers traditional bases beginning with Aristotle and moving through the Greeks, Pope, Swift, and Petronius. McConnell discusses the films of the Marx brothers, Chaplin, Woody Allen, Fellini, Renoir, as well as such films as ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, KING KONG, THE GRADUATE, and COOL-HAND LUKE. The distinctions of the basic kinds of satire and of the ways satire returns toward epic are especially well handled in this section.

Appended to the treatment of the four phases of the cycle is the text's most problematic section: "Images and Archetypes." McConnell presents a series of stills with one-page glosses. The stills function much like the quotes from literary works throughout the book, and I think would have been better placed in the text and integrated with the discussions of individual films. Perhaps the economics of publishing dictated gathering the pictures in one place; even so, the separation drains energy from the development of points key to McConnell's central concept. The stills could have been centralized and ties made to them at the appropriate places in the author's discourse.

The problem with integrating the stills points to a larger problem of integration. The book is a bit too formulaic, a bit too mechanical, a bit too much like a Ph.D. thesis. He lays out a theoretical base in the introduction and then illustrates his theory chapter by chapter. His level of insight and his knowledge are clearly mature, yet there remains a sense of very impressive pieces squeezed

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in as convenient. Control exists primarily over the individual pieces (many of which could be excised and many more of which could be added) but not over the whole; the writer's knowledge and expression finally seem more mature than his sense of structure.

Two other objections. The text is not always consistent in what it assumes of the reader and how it therefore treats the reader. At times I felt I was being talked down to, as if the intended reader had a sophomore's sophistication, and yet to understand what the author says one must be intimately acquainted with a broad range of works of film and literature. The other objection is to the bibliography. Its strangely weak, especially on books about film, given the apparent breadth of primary and secondary reading evinced in the book itself.

I need to make clear, though, that my reservations are minor. The author writes well and clearly (perhaps accounting for the occasional spasm of condescension since he must articulate complex matters), and what he has to say is interesting, challenging, and worthwhile. I learned a good deal from this book, and it is now making the rounds of my colleagues.

JOHN HARRINGTON

California Polytechnic State University,
San Luis Obispo

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CRITICISM

a quarterly for literature and the arts

volume XXII, number 4 · fall 1980

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Second class postage paid at Detroit, Michigan

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RONALD SCHLEIFER*

The Trap of the Imagination: The Gothic Tradition, Fiction, and "The Turn of the Screw"

Irony, wrote Kierkegaard, says one thing and means nothing: it points to an essential emptiness that lies behind language. The awareness of such emptiness, I believe, is the terror that lies just below the surface playfulness and intensity of Kierkegaard's non-Christian writings, a terror in the possibility that behind all he says—behind all "world-historical significance," behind Hegel and Socrates, Schlegel and his attacks on the Danish Christian establishment—are simply the void and silence. Thus in an early journal entry Kierkegaard wrote,

> I will no longer speak to the world. I will seek to forget that I have ever done so. I have read of a man who kept to his bed for fifty years without speaking to a single human being. I will do likewise.... Or else I will seek to move to a place where no one knows or understands my language, nor I theirs, where I can stand like Kasper Hauser—without really knowing how it has all come about—in the middle of Nürnburg street.[1]

Kasper Hauser—the child brought up isolated in the wilderness without any human companions—is an apt figure to define Kierkegaard's terror: he finds himself alone in an alien world, without companions, without speech.

To create this position for himself Kierkegaard chose irony rather than silence; "irony," he writes, is "infinitely silent," yet it is a silence that also speaks, and in speaking it is both the expression of and an alternative to despair.[2] Unlike Kasper Hauser, Kierkegaard shared a language with his fellows, and if his language is always to be

*Ronald Schleifer, an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma, is the Editor of *Genre*.

[1] Quoted in the "Historical Introduction" to Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. Lee M. Capel (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), p. 22. For an extended analysis of Kierkegaard's concept of irony and the "silence" it "expresses," see my "Irony, Identity and Repetition: On Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*," *Sub-Stance*, 25 (1980), 44-54.

[2] *The Concept of Irony*, p. 63.

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misunderstood and is no more than the silence of the man in bed, it also allows Kierkegaard to parody communication and find laughter in his terror. Despair seems at the base of what Kierkegaard later called the indirect communication of his "whole authorship," terror born in the lapse of significance, in the fact that we really don't know "how it has all come about." Speech in Kierkegaard, then, literally responds to nothing, and as Kierkegaard well knew, it can easily be mastered by its motive.

The Gothic novel is also a response to despair, to a world, like the world of Kierkegaard's language, where meaning and significance seem somehow lost or at least displaced. The Gothic hero, like Kasper Hauser, finds himself in an utterly strange world without knowing how he got there. It is a world which, when it responds to the self at all, responds to those aspects of the self which are most hidden and often seem least human. The Gothic novel, Peter Brooks has argued, is a response to the rationalism and desacralization of the late eighteenth century; it is, he says, the reassertion of the Sacred, the assertion of "the presence in the world of forces which cannot be accounted for by the daylight self and the self-sufficient mind." [3] Like Kierkegaard's irony, the Gothic novel is a linguistic assertion, even if it often seems an unconscious one, which posits the Sacred, as Brooks says, "in the most primitive possible manifestations, as taboo and interdiction" (p. 249). In the Gothic the Sacred is asserted, often unconsciously, against its own absence, where even terror, like the desperate playfulness of Kierkegaard's irony, is better than nothing.

In the last years of the nineteenth century two Gothic novels, *Dracula* and *The Turn of the Screw*, were published. Taken together they delimit, to some extent, the boundaries of Gothic fiction. Moreover, in so doing they define a sense of the modern. *Dracula* looks back to the tradition of Gothic fiction, asserting the numinous in the world. It locates itself simultaneously in the tradition of the explained supernatural, a tradition begun in Anne Radcliffe and culminating in the detective fiction of Poe, and in that other, occult tradition that uses supernatural horror as an assertion of the Sacred in the quotidian, a tradition begun in Monk Lewis and culminating in the arabesque of Poe. Both of these "traditions" assert some sort of "sense" in and for the world, whether it be horror or otherwise; they assert the significance of things, residing on the surface of things as

[3] "Virtue and Terror: *The Monk*," *ELH*, 40 (1973), 249.

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they do for the detective, or in their depths, as they do for the magician (psychologist, priest, etc.). *Dracula* combines these in its very epistolary form which presents Dracula's double, the pseudo-priest Dr. Van Helsing, who knows through arcane study what has happened (and like the initiate, refuses to tell); and the detective Dr. Van Helsing (and Mina), who can discover the meaning of the mystery simply by marshalling facts and compiling the various manuscripts that form the story. In *Dracula* the reader knows—he sees things and into things—before the characters do because the texts are already compiled, the hints already marshalled. Never does he doubt the veracity of Harker's story—his written journal—in the way Harker doubts his own experience.

The Turn of the Screw also utilizes these Gothic traditions—as commentators have demonstrated, it too locates itself between natural (i. e. the governess is hysterical) and supernatural (the ghosts are *there*, real corrupting forces) explanations.[4] Yet while *Dracula* looks back to the tradition of Gothic fiction, asserting the numinous in an apparently godless world, *The Turn of the Screw* looks forward to the irony, and even the laughter, of the self-conscious fictional enterprise of the twentieth-century Gothic of Borges and Kafka, Dinesen and even Thomas Mann. That is, the Gothic tradition culminates in Stoker's remarkable power to convey a sense of *presence*: a sense of power, meaning, understanding that explains and naturalizes the horror of the past—the terror of temporality—by discovering the Sacred within (or at least behind) the fullness of moving time, the Profane. And the modern tradition, soon to become the lesson of laughter—"I have lived long enough by now," one of Isak Dinesen's characters says, "to have learned, when the devil grins at me, to grin back"[5]—begins

[4] The "natural" explanation is best exemplified by Edmund Wilson's famous essay, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," in *The Triple Thinkers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1938), pp. 122-64, in which he argues a psychoanalytic interpretation; the "supernatural" explanation is best exemplified by Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 106-34, in which she argues a theological struggle of good and evil. Tzvetan Todorov argues that the Gothic—what he calls "the fantastic"—situates itself in the "uncertainty," the "hesitation" *between* natural and supernatural understandings of experience; see *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975).

[5] Isak Dinesen, "The Deluge at Norderney," in *Seven Gothic Tales* (New York: Modern Library, 1934), p. 77.

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with James's ability to base his novel on *absence*, on the fact that there is nothing, that nothing happens.

Stoker's world is presided over by Count Dracula, the past walking the earth, governing even dreams, and it is articulated by a host of narrators. Moreover, the book, *Dracula*, is presided over by writing, the *transcription* of living speech, itself metaphorically Un-dead: as Mina says to Seward, "I think that the cylanders which you gave me contained more than you intended me to know"; "no one must hear [your passionate words] spoken again.... I have copied out the words on my typewriter and none other need now hear your heart beat, as I did" (p. 229).[6] And at the very end of the novel Jonathan notes that no "authentic document" remains, only the transcription—one might call it the "transfusion"—of the experience. This is a far cry from the governess's world in *The Turn of the Screw* which is presided over by the absent master, who lives elsewhere, and articulated by narrators who, like living speech itself, like purloined letters, never return.[7] Everyone returns in *Dracula*: the grave is opened, the dead return, the secret is revealed, so that *presence*—the voice and heart behind writing, the monster of evil and the sacraments of God behind the world, ubiquitous sexuality behind the story itself—is made manifest.

The central metaphor of *Dracula* is the grave, the crypt, and the space of the novel, despite all its continental movements, is defined by closings-in and confinements. The "mystery" of *Dracula* is to find what already is there, hidden within the grave or simply spelled out, to be deciphered, in the diaries and records of the participants or on the gravestone itself: "on it was but one word: DRACULA.... Its emptiness spoke eloquent to make certain what I knew" (p. 374). The eloquence of the empty grave is the fact that Dracula walks the earth and needs only to be followed and trapped, discovered, spelled out, the meaning of his name made manifest. That is, the world of *Dracula* is a world already too full, where the dead walk and

[6] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (New York: New American Library, 1965), Signet edition. All page references will be given in the text.

[7] Roland Barthes argues that speech is distinguished from writing absolutely by the "expendability of words" in speech; see esp. *Writing Degree Zero* in *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon, 1968). As I will argue, by not "returning," the narrators of *The Turn* are never able to give up—to "reveal"—the "secret" of the novel.

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leave no room, even in dreams, for the living. The land of the past, Transylvania, coexists with the modern world and threatens to engulf it. From Jonathan's first diary entry on his trip east there is an uncanny sense there is more to know than possibly can be known (a plenitude not unlike Poe's *Eureka*); and his first vision of the castle is oppressive because the building, the remnant of the past, is so imposing:

> I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it seemed to be repeated endlessly, and now looking back, it is like a sort of awful nightmare....
>
> When I could see again the driver was climbing into the calèche, and the wolves had disappeared. This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon. We kept on ascending, with occasional periods of quick descent, but in the main always ascending. Suddenly, I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky. (pp. 22, 23)

This is the language of waking, waking onto a world so full of sentient creatures that the very darkness of the landscape seems to contain almost everything, to portend the larger significance of the places transversed. There is something, or seems to be, beyond, behind the landscape, locked there as Jonathan's "dream" (later he doesn't remember the experience described in his journal) seems locked behind (within) his transcription of his experience. That there is something behind (within) the narrative of *Dracula*—something behind even the banal language of Lucy's letters—is given at the beginning in Jonathan's unremembered dream-journey; it stands at the beginning of the novel as Dracula's gravestone stands at the end, both serving to define and spell-out the mystery of the empty grave, to explain the absent corpse. The corpse, after all, is not absent; it is simply displaced, and the "plot" of the novel—as Dracula's many crypts indicate—is to return the corpse to its proper place, its proper "rest."

The passage describing Jonathan's arrival at Castle Dracula demonstrates the importance of movement and rest in the novel: consciousness itself seems tied up with its environment; it begins when movement

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stops, just as Dracula himself—and especially his face (like that of Victor Frankenstein's monster)—stops the narrative whenever he (it) appears. This is important because Dracula's face, like the images of a dream and like Seward's heartbeat, can only be immediately apprehended; his face cannot be reflected. Dracula is an "unmediated vision"—a *presence*—that is locked in experience; experience (narration) must be broken to release him. Meaning in *Dracula* is against time: like Count Dracula (who rarely "appears" in the novel—or the grave—that bears his name), significance is a presence *behind* what happens in those charged moments when appearances are breached and the narrative halted.

Thus, waking is salvation: to become conscious, even of evil, is the repeated goal of the heroes of *Dracula*. This is why "nightmare"—Jonathan Harker's metaphor that is also strangely literal—is the best and most common description of this and other Gothic novels. Dracula controls his victims by taking away their consciousness—dream (or trance: experience remembered as dream) is the meeting place of the vampires and their victims—and the heroes pit day against night in resisting this evil. The space of *Dracula* is defined by confinements, yet its action—the "action" of Jonathan's consciousness—is a recurrent breaking-open of these confinements, breaching them as it were, until the dead walk the earth with the living. The end of *Dracula* is the violation of the crypt; it is not the ingestion of blood but its *transfusion* which is the mark of life against death.

For the novel does assert life against death. Even its portrayal of death—living death—is rendered in terms of repressed sexuality which comentators on the novel invariably describe.[8] Dracula is a sexual being—so are those "voluptuous" vampires the novel recurrently describes—and what the narrative seeks to "hide" under its metaphors of the dead is transfused with a sense of living sexuality which is unmistakable. After all, *Dracula* is the novel of marriages, "polygamous" marriages as Van Helsing says (p. 182), but governed by a sexual presence that it barely conceals. This is the significance of the most striking breaching of confinement—a breaching of the movement of the narrative itself in the novel's longest paragraph, its longest "set-piece":

> We threw ourselves against [the door]; with a crash it burst open. . . .

[8] The finest and most complete discussion of sexuality and *Dracula* is Leonard Wolf, *A Dream of Dracula* (New York: Popular Library, 1972), esp. chap. 6.

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> The moonlight was so bright that through the thick yellow blind the room was light enough to see. On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw all recognised the Count—in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. As we burst into the room, the Count turned his face, and the hellish look that I had heard described seemed to leap into it.... (pp. 287-88)

This sudden interruption, like that of Jonathan's consciousness in the carriage, signals the halt of narrative movement: from the first "burst" until the second a picture is provided, significant relationships are arranged, and narrative action stops. Yet in its stead—in the narrative gap—is offered the fullness of life, the presence of sexuality that hovers behind the narative throughout the novel. Consciousness of such fullness is tied to such gaps; it begins when the narrative stops, revealing Dracula, and especially his physiognomy of "devilish passion," in a picture. That is, Stoker is participating in what Paul de Man calls "classical eighteenth-century theories of representation [which] persistently strive to reduce music and poetry to the status of painting... [and in which] the possibility of making the invisible visible, of giving presence to what can only be imagined, is repeatedly stated as the main function of art." Thus, de Man says,

> it confirms rather than undermines the plenitude of the represented entity. It functions as a mnemotechnic sign that brings back something that happened not to be there at the moment, but whose existence in another place, at another time, or in a different mode of consciousness is not challenged.[9]

[9] "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 124, 123.

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Such "pictures" or "set-pieces" that halt action is the constant device of early Gothic novels: *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley tells us, began with a dream of such a significant fact that haunted her until she "wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around" and thus turned to writing her "ghost story."[10] This is the method, too, of *The Monk*, whose subplot literally interrupts the (supernaturally) sexual night of Ambrosio and Matilda with a hundred-page diversion. The recurrent action of the heroes of *Dracula* is to write: to interrupt the action of the novel and transfuse, as quickly as possible, experience to the page, to overlay experience with writing, thus discovering the underlay of meaning, of the Sacred or its opposite. Finally, at the end after the monster is exorcized, writing is continued and fulfilled in Jonathan's and Mina's son, Arthur John Quincy Van Helsing Harker, into whom, in Mina's secret belief, Quincy's "spirit had passed," underlay and overlay, like the Count's presence, horrible and sexual, upon which the heroes burst in the long set-piece of the novel. Arthur John Quincy Van Helsing Harker is the novel's final "text," symbolical, occult, containing the presence of secret belief, in whom everything "returns." Like Dracula himself, he literally stops the narrative.

Yet life, as James says elsewhere, never really stops. The governess in *The Turn of the Screw* expects in Bly a vision such as Jonathan Harker has had: "I suppose I had expected, or had dreaded, something so dreary that what greeted me was a good surprise" (p. 7).[11] What greets the governess is an experience she has never had, the possibility of movement, a sense of spaciousness—full-length mirrors, the broad fresh front of the house, expansive parks—"the dazzle of . . . possible ways" to encounter experience (p. 42). "It was the first time, in a manner," the governess writes,

> that I have ever known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and the mystery of nature. And then there was consideration—and consideration was sweet. Oh it was a trap—not designed but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever in me was most excitable. (p. 14)

[10] "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein* in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. Peter Fairclough (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 264.

[11] Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966). All page references will be given in the text.

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The trap, for the governess, like her "good surprise," is the trap of plenty, a world and "a time so full that as I recall the way it went it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct" (p. 14). This recalls the title of the novel itself, alluded to on the first page where it is suggested that a ghost story using a child "gives the effect another turn of the screw," and that "two children give two turns!" (p. 1). With these turns, something seemingly extra—something *supplemental*—is given, necessary only for the "effect," a fullness, a plethora.[12] James called his short novel a trap for the unwary reader, "a piece of ingenuity ... to catch those not easily caught" (p. 120, "Preface"), and, as I will argue later, there is a trap lurking in the book's title itself. But the greatest trap, I think, is the governess's freedom and the fact that the novel proceeds, as her terror does, by the apprehension of possibility, spaciousness, and the ground of these, ultimately nothing at all.

For unlike *Dracula*, in *The Turn of the Screw* the breach of sleep does not "dissipate" the terror, but rather enlarges it: waking, consciousness itself, is the terror. The story that "holds" the Christmas revellers at the beginning of the novel is the story not of the terror of nightmare but of the terror of waking. An apparition, the story-teller tells us, "of a dreadful kind" appears

> to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also herself,

[12] The term "*supplement*" is found throughout the work of Jacques Derrida; see esp. *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976). Derrida uses the word in a double sense, as both a "supplement" (an addition) and a "substitute" (a replacement); the terms I use here are "supplement" and "supplant." See also Avrom Fleishman, "Fiction as Supplement," in *Fiction and the Ways of Knowing* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1978), for a use of the term somewhat different from that which I am presenting.

For an extended analysis of *The Turn of the Screw* that shares many of the terms and focusses of this study see Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis, Yale French Studies*, 55/56 (1978), 94-207. Felman attempts, in a psychoanalytical examination of *The Turn*, "not so much to *capture* the mystery's solution, but to follow, rather, the significance of its flight; not so much to solve or *answer* the enigmatic question of the text, but to investigate its structure" (p. 119). Felman's aim, however, is as much to explore the relation between literature and recent developments in psychoanalysis as it is to explore James's text.

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> before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shocked him. (p. 1)

In *Dracula* terror and dream are never far apart; Jonathan's carriage ride, Mina's trances, Lucy's nightwalks, Renfield's madness, Van Helsing's midnight graveyard vigils, the vampires' nighttime powers, all mark the borderline between waking and sleeping. For the governess, however, this terror is in waking, in consciousness itself: her constant terror is of what the children *know* beyond her; her sleep is lost, "haunted," as she says at one point, "with the shadow of something" she was not told (p. 27), but of which, nevertheless, she was strangely, uncannily conscious.

Soon after her establishment at Bly, the governess becomes convinced of the presence of ghosts. She "sees" the figure of Quint as she walks through the park one day while she half expected to see the master of Bly himself. What is most remarkable about this encounter is that it is accompanied by an intense silence, as if all the world had stopped:

> The place moreover, in the strangest way in the world, had on the instant and by the very fact of its appearance became a solitude. To me at least, making my statement here with a deliberation with which I have never made it, the whole feeling of the moment returns. It was as if, while I took in, what I did take in, all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again, as I write, the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped. The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky and the friendly hour lost for the unspeakable minute all its voice. But there was no other change in nature, unless indeed it were a change that I saw with a stranger sharpness. (p. 16)

Later the governess encounters this phenomenon again, referring to it as a "ministering moment" felt when the "summer had turned, the summer had gone; the autumn had dropped upon Bly and had blown out half our lights" (p. 52). In this second account of this "strange" experience—one which alludes directly to the atmosphere of the "first sight of Quint"—the metaphor of the world stricken by death is repeated, literally, in the autumn landscape. The second scene, however, like the scene of writing itself when the governess "hears" "again . . . the intense hush," remains "unaccompanied and empty,"

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and the governess remains "unmolested"—"if unmolested one could call a young woman whose sensibility had, in the most extraordinary fashion, not declined but deepened" (p. 52) into increased perception, increased vision.

The vision is not of Quint—he figures neither in the autumnal scene nor in the scene of writing. Rather, it is a vision of what the governess calls a page later "our prodigious palpable hushes . . . —I can call them nothing else—the strange dizzy lift or swim (I try for terms!) into a stillness, a pause of all life, . . . that I could hear through any intensified mirth or quickened recitation or louder strum of piano" (p. 53). What the governess apprehends is a silence *behind* the world, the recurrent "chill" she mentions, heard and felt "through" whatever momentary noise there is. She seems, for a moment, face to face with consciousness itself—empty, void, silent before the plethora of *its* objects—so that its only expression ("while I took in, what I did take in") is repetition which recurrently "tries" for terms. The moment is transfixed in an "unspeakable" apprehension, "named" by pronouns without antecedents, as silence and death govern consciousness. Whether or not Quint's ghost is really on the battlement—the great question for Mrs. Radcliffe, the question of "eternal significance" for Lewis' Monk, the question of literal and psychosexual interpretors of *Dracula*—is really of no moment here. For the ghosts manifest themselves in *The Turn of the Screw* in absence, a sort of blank page upon which meaning is inscribed: with the "apparition"—the governess's "sharper" consciousness—the narrative and the world stop so that the silence, not meaning, behind them is "heard" through them. In *The Turn* the dead do not prey on the living: when Mrs. Grose asks the governess what can the ghosts do, the governess answers by repeating and echoing the question: "'Do?' I echoed. . . . 'Don't they do enough?'" (p. 49). What they do is simply strike the living world dead and still its moving voices. The evidence of apprehension in *The Turn*—of "waking," of consciousness, of horror—is absence, silence.

That this is a confrontation with the possibilities and spaciousness of consciousness can be seen in James's use of Stoker's central metaphor of confinement, "the inner chamber of my dread." When the governess finally "sees" that the children are the objects of the ghosts' "horrors," she feels exhilarated that Mrs. Grose and herself "might bear things together."

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> It was the idea, the second movement, that led me straight out, as I may say, of the inner chamber of my dread. I could take air in the court, at least, and there Mrs. Grose could join me. . . .
>
> "[Quint] was looking for little Miles." A portentous clearness now possessed me. "*That*'s whom he was looking for."
>
> "But how do you know?"
>
> "I know, I know, I know!" My exaltation grew. "And *you* know, my dear!" (p. 25)

Proof here is just the *repeated* assertion of knowledge, "I know, I know, I know!", intransitive, a state of mind. The syntax of the opening sentence of this section—one which began a weekly installment, and consequently was distanced from the preceding "passage" to which it refers—directs attention away from the object of vision, seemingly designated by the pronoun "what" (a pronoun without a clear antecedent) to the governess's consciousness, "her liability to impressions," the ultimate referent of the pronoun:

> It took of course more than that particular passage to place us together in the presence of what we had to live with as we could, my dreadful liability to impressions of the order so vividly exemplified, and my companion's knowledge henceforth—a knowledge half consternation and half compassion—of that liability. (p. 25)

The elements of this sentence that seem to refer outside the story and the governess's discourse—"what we had to live with," "the order so vividly exemplified," "my companion's knowledge"—all turn back to her "liability," the impressions of consciousness. Even the subject governing "exemplified" is the story itself, the order "exemplified [by what I said to Mrs. Grose, by what I write here]." The inner chamber of dread is replaced with knowledge, but it is knowledge without an object, without a "referent," knowledge of "nothing," which, as we shall see, can never be "justified."

This is why the major characters of *The Turn of the Screw*—Quint, Jessel, the master of Bly—are literally not "there." The governess's characteristic experience—the object of the "stranger sharpness" of her vision—is not, like Van Helsing's to see "into" and "behind" things, but is to "see" what is not there, to "hear" the silence, the hush. Her first observation about Mrs. Grose is that she "felt

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within half an hour that she was so glad [to see me] . . . as to be positively on her guard against showing it too much" (p. 7); later she says, after her second encounter with Quint, that the "terrace and the whole place, . . . all I could see of the park, were empty with a great emptiness" (p. 21); and in the third "interview" "it was the dead silence of our long gaze . . . that gave the whole horror . . . its only note of the unnatural" until "the silence . . . became the element into which I saw the figure disappear" (p. 41). Even her wakefulness, as we have seen, is "haunted with the shadow of something" not said (p. 27).

Yet the crucial moment, I believe, is when the governess directs her attention to the children in section xii, the center of James's tale. In discussing with Mrs. Grose the children's "systematic silence" concerning the ghosts she has "seen," the governess first wonders if she is mad and then realizes "my lucidity must have seemed awful." Like the ghostly silence, her lucidity is apprehended in the act of speech, made "palable" in language: *because* of the "systematic silence" she "makes it out" that the children are in league with Quint and Jessel, that "they're talking of *them*—they're talking horrors!" (p. 48). The governess realizes—she "sees"—in the process of talking to Mrs. Grose that the children's "unnatural goodness" was a fraud:

> The very act of bringing it out really helped me to trace it—follow it all up and piece it all together. "They [the children] haven't been good—they've only been absent. It has been easy to live with them because they're simply leading a life of their own. They're not mine—they're not ours. They're his and they're hers!"
> "Quint's and that woman's?"
> "Quint's and that woman's. . . ." (pp. 48-49)

Thus the unnatural goodness of the children convinces the governess that they know of the ghosts' existences; it convinces her of its opposite, the presence of evil. Time and again in the novel the *absence* of evidence is the surest proof: Flora's lack of response on the lakeshore is proof that "she was perfectly aware" of the ghost (p. 31), and the governess herself, a moment before in this encounter with Miss Jessel, says that she "was conscious—still without looking—"of their "visitor" (p. 29). Later she sums up her method of "proof" when she says of the boat that Flora took that "Our not seeing it is the strongest of proofs" (p. 69).

The void stands behind the world—behind nature and behind

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language—ready to expose itself in the intensity of silence, in the forceful arguments of absence. Here is the significance of James's title for his novel: it is not simply Douglas's remark that the presence of two children turns the screw of a ghost story about one. (This, I suspect, is for the unwary.) Rather, its significance lies in the governess's explanation of her strange and unnatural experience:

> . . . my equilibrium depended on the success of my rigid will, the will to shut my eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what I had to deal with was, revoltingly, against nature. I could only get on at all by taking "nature" into my confidence and my account, by treating my monstrous ordeal as a push in a direction unusual, of course, and unpleasant, but demanding after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue. No attempt, none the less, could well require more tact than just this attempt to supply, one's self, *all* the nature. (p. 80)

The trap of the imagination turns the screw of experience, *supplements* it with nature, a fair front, the ordinary.[13] The unusual and unpleasant experience of which the governess is conscious is the experience governing consciousness itself, the dazzle and play of possibilities, of turning the screw, before the void. The governess "turns" her monstrous ordeal into something ordinary—she supplements it—simply by narrating it, making (and taking) an "account" of it. The important fact is that she *names* the ghosts, speaks to them and even speaks *for* them.[14] The conversation with Miss Jessel she reports to Mrs. Grose (section xvi) never took place in the encounter itself (she had only "looked at me long enough to appear to say that [she had a] right to sit at my table," p. 59). She also speaks for Miles (his "exhibition of tact, of magnanimity [was] quite tantamount to his saying outright . . . ," p. 66), and for Flora ("'I'll be hanged,' [the frank look she launched at me] said, 'if *I'll* speak!'" p. 70). It all seems as if,

[13] The extent of these supplements can be gleaned from Felman's extended discussion of the title and its metaphors, pp. 126, 170 f., 178, 180, *passim*.

[14] One of the important controversies over *The Turn* revolves around the the naming of the ghosts; see, for instance, Harold C. Goddard's elaborate discussion of their naming in "A Pre-Freudian Reading of *The Turn of the Screw*," in the Norton Critical Edition, esp. pp. 190-93. If, in fact, the governess doesn't "name" the ghosts, it is clear from her report of Miss Jessel that she speaks *for* them.

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as the governess says, her "imagination had, in a flash, turned real" (p. 16).

Yet this "turn," this "reality" of the imagination is a far cry from the "reality" that manifests itself in *Dracula*. The name of the Harkers' child is never spoken in *Dracula*, yet it contains a secret; the governess in *The Turn* constantly "speaks" for significant silences in which seems to be no articulate secret. Thus, in another place she says, "I somehow measured the importance of what I have seen by my thus finding myself hesitate to mention it" (p. 18). The unspoken (*unspeaking*) things she narrates somehow gain and measure their importance in their silence; the speech that gives them voices (*natural* voices which are not "revoltingly, against nature") seems, like the governess's deepened awareness, a molestation. Chief among these is the silent awareness that governs her relations with the children. That silence was not vulgar, the governess says, not simply silent allusion to her "predicament." Rather, it was "the element of the unnamed and untouched" in their relationship, "as if, at moments, we were perpetually coming into sight of subjects before which we must stop short, turning suddenly out of alleys we perceived to be blind" (pp. 50-51). Stopping short is an apt image for the aim of Gothic novels in general which, as in the set-piece of *Dracula*, elevate reactions over causes, the imagination over the world. What is most important, here and elsewhere in James, is the reaction—"stopping short"—rather than those things before which one stops. That is, James's characters do not "stop short" before a revelation of more than they are aware of—of what they are "unconscious" of. Rather, they stop short before an occasion for discourse. Thus the first "reaction" we see in this passage is the governess's articulation of her experience; experience is immediately translated ("turned") to metaphor, silence is immediately *narrated* in a hypothesized walk, "as if we were perpetually coming into sight. . . ." That is, what is uncanny about her relation to the children is naturalized and humanized to a stroll, and even while it remains shocking—unusual and unpleasant—it gains a human face.

This is why people talk the way they do in James, and especially in *The Turn*: people are constantly "anticipating" one another, completing one another's (unspoken? uncompleted? absent?) thoughts: "Douglas completed my thought," the narrator says (p. 5). These anticipations take two forms in the dialogue of *The Turn*: characters speak by *repeating* what they heard ("'Quint's and that woman's?'/'Quint's and that woman's . . .'"); and by *completing* what they

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heard ("'I say . . . she was perfectly aware.'/'Do you mean aware of *him*?'/'No—of *her*,'" p. 31). This is the language of James's characters, filling the silence of spaces between words, supplying, as the governess says, *all* the nature, attempting to find a plethora of meaning where there is really very little.

Yet supplying the meaning through repetition and anticipation often becomes supplanting the meaning in these dialogues. Thus when Mrs. Grose asks the governess if the ghost of Miss Jessel spoke in the schoolroom, the governess answers:

> "It came to that. I found her, on my return, in the schoolroom."
>
> "And what did she say?" I can hear the good woman still, and the candour of her stupefaction.
>
> "That she suffers the torments—!"
>
> It was this, of a truth, that made her, as she filled out my picture, gape. "Do you mean," she faltered, "—of the lost?"
>
> "Of the lost. Of the damned. And that's why, to share them—" I faltered myself with the horror of it.
>
> But my companion, with less imagination, kept me up. "To share them—?"
>
> "She wants Flora." (pp. 60-61)

But it doesn't matter, the governess continues, because she's made up her mind "to everything," to write a letter to the master of Bly. This dialogue combines repetition and anticipation: it renders the governess's encounter with Miss Jessel a conversation while it makes the conversation itself an almost silent encounter. At the scene of writing the governess can "still" hear Mrs. Grose, but what she "hears," once again, is silence: the most important parts of conversation are James's ubiquitous dashes—the signs of hesitation, "faltering," hushes. Whenever the governess recounts encounters with the ghost she "hears" again the hush, the faltering voice of nature, the silence. The recurring "hearing" as she writes repeats the false "re-occurrence" of Miss Jessel's silent discourse in the schoolroom as she talks to Mrs. Grose. She supplies the most natural of things, conversation, to that unnatural encounter. Such a supplement lies while it creates discourse, just as the constant anticipations—finding reasons "why," filling out the picture—ultimately destroy discourse through repetition, interruption, confusion. When characters repeat one another they do so to question the meaning of discourse ("Quint's and that woman's?") and the answer they get is what they said; when they antici-

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pate—a form of "repeating" forward—they are usually mistaken. The confusion of James's speakers is confusion of antecedents, of what has come before. They are always seeking origins to ground meaning and significance and make communication possible—origins, sexual and cultural, that literally haunt *Dracula* and the Gothic tradition itself.[15] "I remember feeling with Miles in especial," the governess says, "as if he had had, as it were, nothing to call even an infinitesmal history... [and] scant enough 'antecedents'" (p. 19). This is the most "unnatural" aspect of Miles, that which the governess constantly wants to get "behind," as she tries to get "behind" his words (p. 47). In experience effects always *precede* causes—causes are defined always and already in retrospect. Thus to confuse antecedents, as the speakers of *The Turn* do, as Miles in his person seems to do, is to dislocate the speaker, to place him, like Kasper Hauser, momentarily in a causeless world. (One need only know Count Dracula's "history"—a history in its fullness the antithesis of Miles'—to know him and his "secret.") This is what the silences of James, the governess's "intense hush," do: they offer experience without cause that immediately demands the mediation and antecedents of language.

The governess's written account, after all, is her attempt to supply Miles with a history, with antecedents. That she does so by using her own antecedent, "my vile predecessor" (p. 59), is characteristic of her discourse. But the question of Miles' "history" is the question of *The Turn of the Screw*, the mystery to be detected and solved. And, as in *Dracula*, it is articulated in the written documents of *The Turn*, the various letters that circulate throughout the novel. The governess's account begins with one such letter, one that literally precedes Miles home (as her reading of Gothic novels preceded her visit to Bly), and announces the mystery of *The Turn*: Miles is dismissed from school without an explanation, without a "history." In a brilliant essay describing and contrasting letters and gossip in fiction Homer Brown suggests that "the letter stands in the novel for what is connected with the past, origin, genealogical source, parent."[16] Yet Miles has no past, no genealogy, no parent; that is the

[15] For the place of the past in the Gothic tradition, see Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), esp. chap. 6.

[16] "The Errant Letter and the Whispering Gallery," *Genre*, 10 (1977), 590. Felman has an extended discussion of the letters in *The Turn* that anticipates my own; see "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," pp. 139-48.

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mystery "his" letter announces. Moreover, this letter—like all the other letters in *The Turn*—is received by the wrong person; it is misdirected. Brown notes that "it is always important that what the letter says can't be *said* in any other way, can't be spoken. Instead of the endless round of speculation that is gossip, the letter gives answers (information); its emphasis is *revelation.* The letter is a message to be delivered, gossip is *received*" (581). What is revealed in *The Turn of the Screw* is precisely what cannot be spoken, what the governess cannot articulate or even "see." Like Miles' history, his antecedents, it is a revelation of absence, of "nothing." It is not the documentary hints of an infernal monster which, as in *Dracula* (or "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"), only have to be compiled to reveal the horror. Nothing—absence, words without explanations, without antecedent referents—is the "content" of all the letters to and from Bly.

"To play a role in the novel," Brown continues, "... letters must be read by someone other than the one to whom they are addressed. They must be Purloined" (p. 583).[17] This is the situation of *The Turn*: the governess receives letters addressed to the master, both from the headmaster of Miles' school and the "charming literary exercises" of the children (p. 54); Mrs. Grose has the bailiff write her letters (p. 61); the governess writes to the master but doesn't tell Mrs. Grose "that my letter, sealed and directed, was still in my pocket" (p. 65); and Miles steals—purloins and destroys—this letter (p. 78). The letters of *The Turn of the Screw* are all misdirected. But why does Brown say that letters in novels "must" be purloined? They "must" be, I suspect, because when they are not misdelivered, there can be no plot, no "narration." Even the "plot" of *Dracula* is the marshalling of letters, getting them "straight." When they are delivered there is only precisely what *The Turn of the Screw* lacks, "*revelation.*"[18]

[17] Behind Brown's (and Felman's) discussion of letters is Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis, Yale French Studies*, 48 (1972), 38-72. One should also see Derrida's reading of Lacan's reading, "The Purveyor of Truth," trans. Willis Domingo, James Hulbert, Moshe Ron, M.-R. L., in *Graphesis, Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975). And Barbara Johnson's discussion of them all, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, 457-505.

[18] Thus Felman notes, "it is precisely *because* the letters *fail* to narrate, to construct a coherent, transparent story, that there is a story at all: there is a story *because* there is an unreadable, an unconscious" (143).

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Revelation, after all, is the problem of *The Turn*; its *problem* is its revealed ghosts and what the governess is to make of them. Revelation is more than a turn of the screw; it is revoltingly against nature. It destroys discourse, it creates a solitude, it strikes the world with silence, with death. Like Dracula, revelation is Un-dead, an absence, a *hiatus* in nature. The only response to it, as the governess shows—as the experience of Count Dracula, which time after time demands a written response, shows—is discourse, the *narrated* discourse that covers and denies (supplements and supplants) the lapse and asserts, against the silence, the ordinary and the human. As *Dracula* asserts, there can be no "authentic document" (p. 382); and *The Turn* goes on to assert that even the "transfusion" of the secret to the transcription is impossible. Letters "must" be misdelivered because, like the governess's discourse, they supplement and supplant the revelation they "contain": what the letter from the headmaster cannot *say* is that Miles "said things" (p. 86). "'It was too bad,'" Miles finally confesses, "...'What I suppose I sometimes said. To write home'" (p. 87). Instead of what he said, we have what the headmaster says (or really what the governess says: like Mrs. Grose, we cannot read the letter); instead of to the uncle (himself a surrogate parent) the letter is delivered to the governess. The letter doesn't reveal, after all; it gives something else, more or less. It gives more *and* less. "See him, Miss, first." says Mrs. Grose, "*Then* believe [the letter]" (p. 11).

Yet the letters also give "more"; they "reveal." The letters in *The Turn of the Screw* are constantly conflated with the ghosts. At the end Miles confesses that he stole and opened the governess's letter "to see what you said about me":

> "I opened it."
>
> My eyes were now ... on Miles' own face.... What was prodigious was that at last, by my success, his sense was sealed and his communication [with Quint] stopped: he knew that he was in presence, but knew not of what, and knew still less that I also was and that I did know. And what did this strain of trouble matter when my eyes went back to the window only to see that the air was clear again and—by my personal triumph—the influence quenched? There was nothing there. I felt that the cause was mine and I should surely get *all*. "And you found nothing!"—I let my elation out.

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He gave the most mournful, thoughtful little headshake. "Nothing."

"Nothing, nothing!" I almost shouted in my joy.

"Nothing, nothing," he sadly repeated. (pp. 85-86)

The window and the letter both contain "nothing"—the governess's letter was simply a request for an interview, for speech (p. 78). In this passage the governess conflates the letter and the ghost; she offers two narratives mirroring one another, the languages of life and of death. Quint and the letter "disappear" at the same moment, in the same movement. The governess here is like and unlike the characters of *Dracula*, she both says and doesn't say more than she means, more *and* less than Miles understands. The "presence" Miles is and isn't aware of, I believe, is the "presence" of the governess's ambiguous speech, referring to the letter requesting discourse and to the ghost that stills the world's voices and strikes it with death. Her speech itself is "misdirected," speaking to Quint's "through" Miles, conflating emptiness and fullness. It is simultaneously full and empty, full of Quint, yet "speaking" of a letter which means "nothing." Yet the conflation is more complete than this: Quint's ghost, like most of the "objects" of the governess's sharper sensibility, is itself empty, a hush, absence; and the letter that "contains" nothing promises the revelation of the interview—with the *absent* master, as this dizzying conflation continues. "Which is why," Jacques Lacan writes, "we cannot say of the purloined letter that, like other objects, it must be *or* not be in a particular place but that unlike them it will be *and* not be where it is, wherever it goes."[19] "Horrible as it was," the governess said earlier, "his lies made up my truth" (p. 84).

The confusion of ghosts and letters is the confusion of writing and death (a situation suggested by Dinesen's preoccupation with Scheherazade in *Seven Gothic Tales*). Writing wards off silence, but it also creates its own silence. This is why, I suspect, the governess "hears" better while she writes the text we read. When the governess discovers Miss Jessel in the schoolroom, "at first blush" she imagines she sees "some housemaid . . . availing herself . . . of my pens, inks and paper, . . . [making] the considerable effort of a letter to her sweetheart" (p. 59). And of her first encounter with Quint she says, "I saw him

[19] "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" 54. Felman also describes in a more extended theoretical discussion the conflation of letters and ghosts, 149-61.

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as I see the letters I form on this page" (p. 17). Writing confuses itself with death because it leaves so much out and doing so, it creates the double, "mirroring" discourse I mentioned before, leaving too much in; it is inscribed in the face of loss.[20] Writing, like the letters formed on the page and the letter to the sweetheart, *has to be read;* it has *yet* to be read: this is what Brown means when he says "the letter is a message to be delivered, gossip [speech] is *received.*" That delivery passes through and carries with it the intense hush, absence, death. The governess's whole narrative, itself making "the considerable effort of a letter to [a] sweetheart" (yet, as Douglas says, it does so silently, "not in any literal vulgar way"—p. 3), is misdirected to Douglas who, after "a long silence" for which he "had had his reasons" (p. 2), read it "to our hushed little circle" (p. 4), and later, as a sort of death-bed statement "committed" it to the narrator who offers it to us (p. 4).

This brings us to a final question of *The Turn*, the question of the governess's letter. For whom was it written? This question can only be asked of writing; speech, like gossip, is always directed, "received." (And yet this too is problematic: who, after all, "receives" the governess's last speech to Miles/Quint? Or is it "written" as well?) In a sense it is a misdirected letter to Harley Street, written *not to be delivered*, a letter to a sweetheart that "speaks"—as Miss Jessel does—through silence, not in any literal, vulgar way. Yet in another sense the governess's writing is a letter that "justifies," written in answer to the governess's own question in response to her experience: "it was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he [Miles] *were* innocent, what then on earth was I?" (p. 87). At crucial moments the governess speaks of her justification—when she sees Miss Jessel the last time (p. 71), and when Mrs. Grose informs her that Flora too "says things" (p. 77). But the two motives come together in the governess's description of her daily "hour" of peace she felt *before* the ghosts appear at Bly:

[20] For a short discussion of the relation between writing and death, see Joseph N. Riddel's examination of Poe in "A Somewhat Polemical Introduction: The Elliptical Poem," *Genre*, 11 (1978). Concerning "The Raven" he notes, "it is not a lost presence, the maiden Lenore, that is remembered, but 'mournful remembrance' itself, remembrance as an emblem that is marked through and through as death. That is, utterance itself is death..." (465). See also Felman's argument that the manuscript of the story provides, much as Count Dracula *literally* does, "a *return* of the dead *within the text*" (128).

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> It was a pleasure at these moments to feel myself tranquil and justified; doubtless perhaps, also to reflect that by my discretion, my quiet good sense and general high propriety, I was giving pleasure—if he ever thought of it!—to the person to whose pressure I had responded. (p. 15)

Her letter (*The Turn of the Screw*) justifies her—both in relation to the master and in relation to Miles, in relation to love *and* death—*only* if it is not delivered. If delivered it becomes literal and vulgar: in relation to the master it betrays his charges, in relation to Miles it betrays the unspoken possibility that her "strange sharpness" in "hearing" silences is madness.

Her letter covers "confounding and bottomless" experience of guilt and, beneath this, of not being thought of—guilty or not—at all. Undelivered and unread, it supplements her guilt with "justification" and supplants her absence—her "ghostliness"—in relation to the master with the narrative altogether. Like the children, like the ghost of Miss Jessel, the governess has no one to write to, just as the letters she reads are meant for someone else. Her final attempt at justification is her final attempt to read the headmaster's letter (a letter not meant for her): "He stole *letters*!" she says (p. 78). Yet this letter, finally, like the one she tries to write, says nothing; it marks the absence—the misdirection—of all the letters of *The Turn of the Screw*.

The trap of the imagination, then, is the fact that it responds to nothing—to empty letters, to ghosts, to its own unnatural power—the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. Its language is Kierkegaard's irony, grinning at the devil with a language that willfully misunderstands, that turns the screw, the language of fiction. Much as the ancient Athenians called the Furies the Eumenides and gave them human form, so James's narrative falsely names the unnatural horror of indifference the human horror of ghosts: it makes justification seemingly possible by discovering and humanizing, as the Greeks had done, the chthonic origins of life, inarticulately expressed in the hush of silence. This takes place in and by means of language: Jacques Lacan has noted that in psychoanalysis the operative "cure" of hysterics is not memory but verbalization, and the same is true in James.[21]

[21] Of the importance of verbalization in analysis, Lacan notes that the patient "has made its passage into the *verbe* or more precisely into the *epos* by which he brings back into present time the origins of his own person," so

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Value, that is, is created (supplementally, supplantingly) and *remains* in the misdirected, mistaking language which points it out—even in the Gothic language of horrible "ghosts" that seen to speak out of the hush of nature.

The horror of ghosts in James's story is what Lacan calls the Symbolic, a shadow or unreal fiction without which we cannot live; they are what Derrida calls the *supplement* which both supplants and adds to an inarticulate, inhuman experience human images and values. Thus the action of fiction discovers value in the face of an indifferent world simply by articulating it. This is the strength of Kierkegaard's irony: to say something and to mean nothing, yet a nothing upon which to base human life. James's governess humanizes the enigma of the children with ghostly antecedents which make their "unnatural" goodness, their uncanny Otherness, humanly and verbally, if supernaturally, comprehensible. This action—the creation of human origins and antecedents, which is a return and an anticipation at once—is the business of language and the trap of the imagination.

that it is verbalization, not memory, that humanizes origins; see *The Language of the Self*, trans. Anthony Wilden (New York: Delta, 1975), p. 17. Why this should be so is an issue outside the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, I would like to make a tentative suggestion here. If, as I have argued, "revelation" precludes narration and implies solitude and isolation, then narration would create at least some sense of community. Such a community is what I am calling the "human" realm and what Lacan calls the Symbolic: it is the realm of language providing that Saussurian community of a "system of differences" which makes meaning possible. For a brilliant analysis of Lacan's terms, see Frederic Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, 338-95.

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JAMES S. HANS*

Presence and Absence in Modern Poetry

Modern poetry, we are often told, is a poetry about language, and the poets themselves frequently seemed ready enough to accept this premise, at least while they were battling for the attention of readers. Williams regularly complained that Eliot and Pound had forsaken a truly American voice for the English continental tradition while Pound and Stevens in turn would tell Williams that his poetry was composed of "loam" or the "anti-poetic." While these arguments pointed to important differences between the poets, though, there is no doubt that the term "modernism" does not merely apply to a series of wildly eclectic poetic ventures, that poets like Eliot and Williams do have something fundamental in common that makes "modernism" an applicable term for their work. This "something" has been called everything from a return to "reality" to an emphasis on self-reflexive poetry, but the reality these poets see is so various and the reflexivity of their poetry so different that another approach to their work seems necessary.[1]

What poets like Eliot and Williams do seem to share is an understanding of the relationship between presence and absence in the world, and their understanding of this relationship develops in complexity as they mature as poets. One could say that presence and absence ultimately come to be defined in terms of the relationship between language and reality, but for both Eliot and Williams the problem was more profound than that. The important question for both was how human experience could be redeemed in a world where absence could no longer be transcended through a religious commitment, and their changing ways of perceiving this difficulty are finally quite similar despite the fact that Eliot became an Anglican while Williams continued to write from a particularly American perspective.

If one chooses to look at Williams and Eliot in terms of their struggle

* James S. Hans is an Assistant Professor of English at Kenyon College and the author of *The Play of the World*.

[1] While I am taking issue here with the terminology used in J. Hillis Miller's *Poets of Reality* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1965), and Joseph Riddel's *The Inverted Bell* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), I am also most heavily indebted to these two works, both of which opened up new and important perspectives on modernism.

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to understand the relationship between presence and absence, one must begin by arguing that their poetry is not centrally about Being or language but about the nature of human experience. They may have provided language with a much more important place than it had had in the past, but it is still only one element in man's experience of the world, albeit a much more important one than it had been. Williams points this out early in his career when he tells us in *The Embodiment of Knowledge* that "There is a place, anterior to all philosophical, aesthetic, or scientific arguments actively. It is the basis upon which all rests." [2] He amplifies:

> This position has its counterpart in all.
> It is the past, (from which man has come). It is the "night mind," the chaos, the source of religion; the preconscious, the savage, the animal, the plant, the inorganic—what you will.
> But it is none of these. It is one: all tentatives fit into it, not it into them. It is particularly not "the past" out of which knowledge or consciousness going "up" proceeds, leaving it behind. It exists co-incidentally with consciousness, systems, is not escaped. (133)

These remarks are particularly concerned with the origins of human experience, and they describe these origins in terms of presence: the "place" could well be capitalized, for its anteriority, its originary status, is revealed in every line of the description. The place of anteriority is what I shall call the undifferentiated, so as not to ground it necessarily in "Being"—we shall leave its utimate ontological status on the side for the moment.

Here it is clear that the "one" fits everything into it. The inorganic, plants, animals, human consciousness, history and even (tacitly) language derived from it. It is the presence from which things come to be. This is the level of experience that Williams is concerned with, the undifferentiated moment where things have not yet emerged, where they have not yet been differentiated, and this is the place of the poet:

> We must not forget that we praise the unknown, the mystery about which nothing can be said; and second, that we praise in silence, the rest being but perishable signs. Then lest

[2] William Carlos Williams, *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, ed. Ron Loewinsohn (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 132. Subsequent references to this work will be noted parenthetically in the text.

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> we mistake our signs for the reality let them be ever new, for ever new for only by forever changing the sign can we learn to separate from it its meaning, the expression from the term, and so cease to be idolaters. (182)

Again we can see a view of the world as presence: the "unknown," the "mystery" and the like are hardly terms one would describe an absence by; the "perishable signs" of language are contrasted to the "reality," and one could hardly be an idolater of something which did not exist. At this point in his career, Williams lives in a world with presence at the center.

The function of the poet is to praise the unknown, to call attention to its existence by continually refreshing our view of it through "ever new" signs. The poet makes the world over anew continually, yet the things which come to be exist only to remind us of the center from which they originate, as Williams tells us in his famous mathematical analogy:

> A course in mathematics would not be wasted on a poet, or a reader of poetry, if he remembers no more from it than the geometric principle of the intersection of loci: from all angles lines converging and crossing establish points. He might carry it further and say in his imagination that apprehension perforates, at places, through to understanding—as white is at the intersection of blue and green and yellow and red. It is this white light that is the background of all good work.[3]

The greens and blues and yellows of the poem, the perishable signs in the earlier remark, exist only to cancel out and reveal the white light underlying them, the unknown which it is the poet's job to praise.

These few passages offer us a fairly complete view of Williams' conception of experience and poetry. On the one hand, all experience begins with the unknown, with our interaction with the undifferentiated flux of life; from this undifferentiated interaction, we differentiate various things and locate them with perishable signs. And since the signs are inadequate renderings of the undifferentiated, being only partial differentiations of it, we can never be content to live simply in the world of our differentiations. We must continually experience the undifferentiated in order to make new differentiations, lest we forget

[3] William Carlos Williams, "Marianne Moore," *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 122.

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that all differentiations are only partial markers of the unknown which can never be wholly articulated.

The poem is rather the reverse of this process. It takes the differentiations that the poet's experience of the undifferentiated have led to and makes a poem of them, making sure, however, that the particular images all reflect on the undifferentiated from which the images are derived. This is the process which Williams' poems are about. The surface of an early poem like "Spring Strains," for example, describes with meticulous care the various quotients of energy each of the objects in the poem has. Buds are "slenderly" anchored and drawn to the earth, limbs "pull downward/sucking in the sky," the sun has a "creeping energy, concentrated/counterforce," and so on.[4] All the objects express natural desire according to their mass and according to their placement in the natural scene. But the energy of the poem comes not only from the particular differentiations of buds, birds, trees and the like, but from the total display of natural energy or desire. It is the energy, the desire, which is the white light of the poem, the unknown, and the poem has value only to the extent that this natural desire is the focus of the poem, only to the extent that the reader is able to locate the various natural differentiations presented in the poem with energy itself. The poem is not about language or trees or the sun; it is about the (unknown) energy and about how the poem, and experience in general, go about differentiating that unknown energy in life. To be sure, the images give the poem its color, without which it would not be a poem, but their surfaces are intended to remind us of the white light, not the colors.

In this sense, all of Williams' earlier poetry focuses our attention on the unknown mystery of energy/desire in the world. To give but one more example, one can see in "To A Solitary Disciple" a similar process, one that makes clear that Williams objects not only to static poems but also to poems which treat art as a part of culture and not of nature. When he tells his "disciple" that he should

> Rather notice, mon cher,
> that the moon is
> tilted above

[4] William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 159. Subsequent references to this book will be noted parenthetically in the text with page numbers and "EP."

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the point of the steeple
than that its color
is shell pink, (167, EP)

he is first of all emphasizing fields of force again, the interplay between steeple and moon, stressing the active interplay as opposed to the static picture of color, but he is also urging that steeple and moon are both parts of the same process, not different objects in separate spaces, natural and cultural. The interaction between them is the essential element of their placement, not that one is man-made and one natural, as the differentiations of the older culture would suggest.

The third and fourth stanzas of the poem make the point more forcefully by demonstrating the futility of the nature/culture dichotomy:

Rather grasp
how the dark
converging lines
of the steeple
meet at the pinnacle—
perceive how
its little ornament
tries to stop them—

See how it fails!
See how the converging lines
of the hexagonal spire
escape upward—
receding, dividing!
—sepals
that guard and contain
the flower! (167, EP)

The "little ornament" at the pinnacle of the church is designed to stop the converging lines, to differentiate cultural space from natural space, but it cannot. The hexagonal lines "escape upward" to interact with the moon that is also part of the pinnacle's space. The distinction between the two is specious, and there is absolutely no reason to carve out different planes for the two—they exist in a harmony of forces, a harmony of energetic interplay of desires that is focused by the church, but which is unduly restricted by the church only according to the older conception of the world, according to a theological system whose differentiations no longer speak of the undifferentiated in a meaningful way. The church is now only a location that

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measures out the relation between human and natural forces, a location which brings these forces together.

The Williams of this early period does not transform nature into culture; instead, he transforms culture into nature. The cultural edifice of language is not the dominant element here—the natural force of energy/desire is, and language is simply one more expression of that natural energy and desire. And this energy is not an absence or a fiction that the poet makes up to center his world; it is a presence, a mystery that is everywhere, the presence that is marked in man's movements between undifferentiated and differentiated experience, the presence that is marked in precisely the same way in a poem, if it is a good one.

Of course, Williams' view of the world does not remain static, and in his "second" period we begin to see some revision of the above ideas. He still holds to the basic movement between undifferentiated experience and its differentiation, but he begins to have doubts about the mystery of desire. The dilemma he faces is fairly well exemplified in "To All Gentleness," a nostalgic poem which questions the energy of the earlier poems, asking

> Violence and
> gentleness, which is the core? Is
> gentleness the core? [5]

The energy of desire is no longer taken for granted as an innocent energy—Williams sees that it can as easily be understood as a violence. He seems to be unable to decide here, unable because he fears it is violence and wants it to be gentleness. Hence the ambiguous significance of the arrow that flies through the poem:

> The arrow flies! the barb
> is driven home and . . . strength
> thrust upon weakness, the convulsive ecstasy
>
> achieved, in the moment of impact
> we are left deafened and blinded, blind to
> the sun and moon, the brilliant
> moonlight leaves, to fish and fowl. . . . (27, LP)

In the earlier poems, sexual desire was a positive force, here akin to

[5] William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Later Poems*, rev. ed. (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 28. Subsequent references to this book will be noted parenthetically in the text with page numbers and "LP."

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gentleness; it was merely one expression of natural energy. Here, however, the flight of the arrow, described in sexual terms, is no longer gentleness but violence: it is "strength thrust upon weakness," it leads to a "convulsive ecstasy," hardly a gentle description. While the question of the poem seems to suggest that Williams does not want to tie the energy of the world to violence, the poem also suggests that that is the direction in which the poetry is moving.

Indeed, we need go no further than the second poem in *Collected Later Poems* to see that the intensity of the earlier work, the intensity of innocent desire, has been transformed into violence. The very beginning of "Catastrophic Birth" exemplifies this:

> Fury and counter fury! The volcano!
> Stand firm, unbending. The chemistry
> shifts. The retort does not fracture.
> The change reveals—change.
> The revelation is compact—
> compact of regathered fury
>
> By violence lost, recaptured by violence
> violence alone opens the shell of the nut. (8, LP)

The "Fury and counter fury" of the volcano are here discussed in terms of change, necessary change which "reveals." The revelation that is brought about by violence is necessary to break through the shell of convention that clouds our perception of the world and prevents us from experiencing it immediately: "By violence lost," the poet informs us, referring to the violence of convention which distorts the world, forms a rigid, ossified shell around the meat of the world itself; "recaptured by violence," we are told, because violence alone opens the shell of the nut and allows us to experience the world outside of the shell of convention.

As the poem continues, we see that Williams is actually updating his earlier statements about the unknown white light:

> Under violence the meat lies regained
>
> Each age brings new calls upon violence
> for new rewards, variants of the old.
> Unless each hold firm
> Unless each remain inflexible
> there can be no new. The new opens
> new ways beyond all known ways. (8, LP)

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We still need ever-new signs in order to keep the world from covering over the meat, and we still need to break out of the conventions these perishable signs offer to us, but here the task is a much more violent one, rather like a volcano than like a hymn of praise. And Williams also sees a greater complexity in the process, for he refers to this volcano as a "death dealing/chemistry," telling us that when "The revelation is complete" "Peace is reborn above the cinders." The naive energy of the early work turns into a violent energy that is destructive at the same time it is creative, that leads to death as well as to new life.

In short, Williams has moved away from the innocent, exuberant view of nature and poetry, has found that violence is inherent in them too. He is beginning to move in the direction of an absence-oriented poetry created out of the violent interplay of signs, but he has not quite reached that point here, for the poem does speak of breaking through the crust of the shell to get to the meat of the nut, and this signifies that he believes that the ossified signs have covered over something, the unknown presence. In other words, he still sees the world as a nut with meat in it, not, as in the famous structuralist metaphor, as an onion with only more and more layers of the linguistic edifice to slice through. Violence has been added, but it is a violence which leads to the presence of the unknown.

Even when we come to the first four books of *Paterson*, it is difficult to conceive of Williams as adopting a position similar to the current deconstructionist one. To be sure, as always, he places a great deal of emphasis on language and its ability to create our world, but he never seems to go over the edge into absence. Rather, *Paterson* would appear to be nostalgic, always comparing the present with a past or possibly future time when language will no longer be "divorced" from people's minds. The people of America are divorced from their language, which makes language defective because it no longer adequately describes the world in which the people live, but Williams himself seems to think that he is not divorced from his language. Thus, while he may be describing the divorce and absence he sees in the world, there is no indication that he thinks this is the way the world should be. When he speaks of

> . . .that nul
> that's past all
> seeing

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the death of all
that's past
all being,[6]

he is referring to the course that the modern world is on, not to a linguistically ordered world of endless traces.

The best place in the poem to turn to for confirmation of this fact is Book III, since for Williams the library comes to symbolize all that is ossified in our society, comes to symbolize our rigid adherence to a series of conventions that create blockage because they are not indigenous to the American culture. For Williams, "The Library is desolation it has a smell of its own/of stagnation and death" (100, P). It is a mausoleum that entombs modern man's imagination if he succumbs to its way of looking at the world.

The library is only one manifestation of the lost vision of modern man, but Williams finds it to be the most powerful one because the language of the library is everywhere and cannot be avoided. Those who turn to the old texts for answers to modern problems are only likely to be caught up in the traps of a static view of the world, and Williams makes it clear that this stasis is not merely a metaphorical death, as might be presumed. Instead,

Death lies in wait,
a kindly brother—
full of the missing words,
the words that never get said—
a kindly brother to the poor.
The radiant gist that
resists the final crystallization... (109, P)

Like the mystery of presence, the static view of the world also "resists the final crystallization," cannot be articulated because it is undifferentiated; unlike the mystery of presence, though, here "the words that never get said" are words of death, for the picture is static and posits an eventual fulfillment of desire. In the world of process, the words are words of life because desire can never be fulfilled, because the undifferentiated can never be encompassed by language, while

[6] William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 77. Subsequent references to this book will be noted parenthetically in the text with page numbers and "P."

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stasis and death are the unformulated words that are found in the heart of the library, and one can only avoid the grasp of the library by seeing what those words are.

Thus, Williams presents us with two views of the end of this world of stasis, one of which is the burning of the library. We read, he says,

> . . .not the flames
> but the ruin left
> by the conflagration
> Not the enormous burning
> but the dead (the books
> remaining). (123, P)

This is indeed a world of total absence where books have become only the dead traces of the original flame, where we find only the "ruin" left by the conflagration, and not the burning flame itself. The books are all futile attempts to recreate a presence that never existed in them. If we read them, we find only

> a nothing, surrounded by
> a surface, an inverted
> bell resounding, a
>
> white-hot man become
> a book, the emptiness of
> a cavern resounding. . . .(123, P)

These books have nothing at their core, not the presence and life that we expect to find. This is not Williams' view of all books, of all poems, however, but only of those texts whose measure does not correspond to the modern world because of their static perspective of the world. It is precisely this absence that Williams is trying to overcome in his poetry, not an absence that he is embracing. Though he concedes that absence is part of the world, he finds it to be at the center of only the static world view promulgated by science and the English continental tradition.

A little later in Book III, we see again that Williams believes the absence of the library to be the result of a particular way of viewing the world and not an inherent characteristic of the center when he provides a natural description which demonstrates the same results of the static view of the world. It, too, leads to the undifferentiated, but the ruins of the library are replaced by mud:

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> When the water has receded most things have lost their form. They lean in the direction the current went. Mud covers them.... (140, P)

After the conflagration, "most things have lost their/form" and have become undifferentiated mud, which leads to the question: "fertile (?) mud." Williams considers the possibility that this mud could be fertile, could be the mud of undifferentiated life rather than undifferentiated death, but he rejects it:

> If it were only fertile. Rather a sort of muck, a detritus, in this case—a pustular scum, a decay, a choking lifelessness—that leaves the soil clogged after it, that glues the sandy bottom and blackens stones....(140, P)

The mud is not fertile and will not lead to new growth, but Williams also carefully states that this mud is "a detritus/*in this case*"—he is not suggesting that undifferentiated death underlies everything in the world. It is a detritus only because it is the remnant of a world view that was based on stasis and death, and since this is the case, only stasis and death are likely to come from it. Throughout the book of the library Williams is only pointing to the logical consequences of the *old* view of the world, a view that he wants to replace with his own view of variable measure.

Rather than decentering his world, then, Williams is recentering it, moving it away from its progression toward the nul. But this recentering is not a return to his naive view in the earlier poetry, a view of pure presence. It is a complex view that deals with absence and violence as well. Though we find the strongest developments of this new view in the last poems, we see Williams' basic understanding in the passage that inaugurated the variable foot:

> The descent beckons
> as the ascent beckoned
> Memory is a kind
> of accomplishment
> a sort of renewal
> even
> an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places
> inhabited by hordes
> heretofore unrealized,
> of new kinds— (77, 78, P)

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Here the descent into the world of absence is linked to the ascent of presence; they are seen as two parts of the same process, so closely connected, in fact, that the descent into absence leads back to presence because "the spaces it opens are new places" that are "inhabited by hordes/heretofore unrealized."

Williams continues the passage by showing the positive value of the descent into the nul:

> No defeat is made up entirely of defeat—since
> the world it opens is always a place
> formerly
> unsuspected. A
> world lost,
> a world unsuspected
> beckons to new places
> and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory
> of whiteness. (78, P)

A new world of presence comes out of defeat, out of the descent, for in the memory, in the imagination, the defeat opens up parts of the world we were unaware of before, since descent and defeat only occur in situations where something goes against our expectations, where something unpredictable arises. Defeat leads to the most meaningful kind of experience, that kind which deals with the intransigent aspects of our experience which fail to fit into our ways of perceiving the world, opening up a new terrain for us to explore and forcing us out of preconceived views of experience and the world.

In short, as Williams concludes:

> The descent
> made up of despairs
> and without accomplishment
> realizes a new awakening:
> which is a reversal
> of despair. (78, P)

Not only is it clear that Williams believes that the presence is at the center of the world, but he has also established a relationship between it and absence. That he makes a point of the fact that absence, the descent, *follows* the ascent, and that descent leads to *another* ascent seems indication enough that presence is the center. Further, he has shown here that while presence is the origin, absence

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helps open up further presence by showing its lack and by forcing us out of our predisposed categorizations of the world, categorizations which, because of their static view, lend themselves to absence.

There are other places in *Paterson* where the same process is at work, as in the use of the fire in Book III and in the description of the sea in Book IV, but we must turn our attention to one of Williams' final expressions of this relationship, found in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." Here the battle between presence and absence takes place as a confrontation between love and death. On the one hand, we are told that

> There is no power
> so great as love
> which is a sea,
> which is a garden—
> as enduring
> as the verses
> of that blind old man
> destined
> to live forever.[7]

But while the poet knows that love prevails over death in the world and in his own life, he also recognizes that other people seem to be worshipping death rather than life. In contrast to the poem which reflects the "dance" of the sea "upon that profound depth/where/it seems to triumph," love does not seem to dominate the lives of others, for "The bomb puts an end/to all that" (165, B). Thus,

> ...the bomb
> also
> is a flower
> dedicated
> howbeit
> to our destruction, (165, B)

and this flower of death pervades the modern era. Instead of being captivated by love, we are captivated by death, as

> The mere picture
> of the exploding bomb

[7] William Carlos Williams, *Pictures from Brueghel* (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 166. Subsequent references to this work will be noted parenthetically in the text with page numbers and "B."

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fascinates us
so that we cannot wait
to prostrate ourselves
before it. (165, B)

Faith in love has been replaced by a faith in death because "we do not believe/that love/can wreck our lives" (165, B).

Williams, however, wants to reclaim for us the domain of presence and love, but he can only do it through a paradox one can find in all of the other modern poets, the paradox expressed in the first lines of the "Coda":

Inseparable from the fire
its light
takes precedence over it.
Then follows
what we have dreaded—
but it can never
overcome what has gone before. (178, B)

The light of the fire, presence and life, is itself inseparable from the fire, and yet it takes precedence over it. The fire itself is both presence and absence, gentleness and violence, life and death, and all of these elements are inseparable. Still, somehow, the presence of light precedes the absence of the fire, generates the fire which destroys and still overcomes it by its precedence. Once the poet comes to see that undifferentiated experience contains both presence and absence, life becomes problematic, for it is difficult to see how one can have both at the same time. If absence is present, how can presence possibly exist, since presence itself, if it truly is presence, cannot be tainted at all by absence? If presence and absence are both part of the same undifferentiated state, then presence would seem to be negated, for any absence at all is a denial of presence.

Nevertheless, Williams believes that both presence and absence are inseparable aspects of undifferentiated experience, that presence somehow precedes absence, even if they are inseparable, even if the light cannot flourish without the fire. This is indeed the paradox of modern poetry, expressed here in terms of fire, but perhaps better expressed by the simple statement that "The light/for all time shall outspeed/ the thunder crack" (181, B). The light of lightning always precedes the thunder crack of absence, though the two are bound together. But this image only displaces the paradox, for while it carefully shows

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the precedence of light over shadow, it can do so only by expressing the movement through time, and in fact undifferentiated experience is momentary, simultaneous. The paradox remains, since here one simply has to say that lightning "outspeeds" the thunder crack, precedes it, and yet both occur at the same time. The language of differentiation simply cannot overcome paradox at some point if it is to describe presence which precedes absence and is yet somehow simultaneous with it.

Although absence came close to dominating the poetry of the middle period of Williams' career, at the end he realizes that the resolution of his conflict is clear, based simply on the fact that if

> the light itself
> has escaped,
> the whole edifice opposed to it
> goes down. (181, B)

The parodox he must live with may not be very satisfactory, but it makes better sense than an absence-oriented world, for if there is no light of presence, if there is nothing but absence, absence itself makes no sense, cannot exist, and "goes down." Williams finally sees that there is really only one choice to make, the other one being totally absurd:

> So let us love
> confident as is the light
> in its struggle with darkness
> that there is as much to say
> and more
> for the one side
> and that not the darker... (180, P)

Of course, Williams is really making a moral choice here, one that is based on a view toward improving the lot of humanity, as he shows by claiming that

> the palm goes
> always to the light;
> Who most shall advance the light—
> call it what you may! (180, 181, B)

It does not matter what one calls the light of presence, whether it be simply light or presence or energy or the unknown, whether love, the good, or God—for Williams it is the same thing, the undifferentiated

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light of love which is at the core of human experience, the light that has always driven man to any advances he has made.

The path of Williams' career, then, proceeds in a dialectical manner, beginning first with a poetry of innocent presence, overturning that into the violence of absence, and finally bringing the two together in a paradoxical formulation which stresses the light of presence while conceding the darkness of absence. That such a paradox is ultimately necessary is easy enough to see, for Williams has always been concerned with undifferentiated human experience, with experience that is not precategorized by the differentiations of language. He always believed that undifferentiated experience was possible, and he always believed that it was the most valuable of human experiences. Thus, he came to write a poetry about this kind of experience and never really wrote a poetry specifically about language. At the most, he wrote a poetry about the relationship between language and undifferentiated experience, and since his view of this relationship is one that speaks of presence, one can hardly argue that language and reflexivity dominate the poetry, for only a linguistically oriented universe would make language its primary subject.

Although Williams was clearly moving poetry in new directions, he is not as " post-modern " as he sometimes seems. In the language of the deconstructionists, one would have to say that, though he wavered in the middle of his career, he seems firmly embedded in the onto-theological tradition that some think he has escaped. As such, he remains firmly a modern, steadfastly a poet who does not let the absence of language dominate his world, steadfastly a poet who still believes that the function of language and poetry is to differentiate, however imperfectly, the undifferentiated experience which is the basis for all meaningful, creative human activity. He still believes in an experience which precedes and takes precedence over language, an experience which language must serve if it is to be creative, if language is to prevent mankind from being buried under the ossification of long-dead signs which are dead because they no longer adequately reflect the undifferentiated interaction between man and world.

T. S. Eliot's poetry, of course, has never been accused of being post-modern, but because of his conversion it is not always easy to see that his poetic career follows a pattern quite similar to Williams'. Though his interpretive framework differs considerably from Williams', there is little doubt that Eliot's description of the poet's job, " to find words

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for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people hardly ever feel, because they have no words for them," [8] is approaching the same concerns that we found in Williams' remarks about the unknown mystery. Likewise, one can see a common terrain in Eliot's statement about the possible functions of poetry, which

> may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed; may help to break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are constantly forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it.[9]

Here we find the same expression of the need to differentiate the undifferentiated, the same need to put off "perishable signs" that have grown old and come up with fresh ones in order to penetrate "the substratum of our being." The language is more philosophical and has a subjective slant to it, but Eliot conceives of his task, if not the precise maner of carrying it out, in almost exactly the same way that Williams conceives of his role.

While Eliot is concerned with the same area of human experience, however, he does not begin his career with the same understanding of experience that Williams has. In a sense, Eliot recognized the deconstructionist perspective from the beginning but always refused to accept it. He always located "reality" in the realm of immediate experience, in the undifferentiated interaction between man and world "before distinctions and relations have been developed, and where as yet neither subject nor object exists," [10] but he maintained early on that "although immediate experience is the foundation and the goal of our knowing, yet no experience is only immediate" because "if it were, we should certainly know nothing about it. . . ." [11] As with Williams' lightning metaphor, we can only know immediate experience when we are self-conscious, but if we are self-conscious, the experience is no longer immediate, since self-consciousness presupposes that we have at least partially separated a subject from the undifferentiated

[8] T. S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. 134.

[9] T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), p. 155.

[10] F. H. Bradley quoted by Eliot in *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964), p. 16.

[11] T. S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience*, p. 18.

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interaction, and that is to make distinctions that are not applicable to immediate experience.

The paradox of immediate experience was with Eliot from the beginning, but, unlike Williams, he approached it from a subjective, extremely self-conscious vantage point. In poems like "Prufrock," we see that Eliot's problem is how to escape from and find the world outside of the self. Prufrock is someone who cannot escape his own subjectivity in one sense, but in another he is a person who is capable of immediate experience yet incapable of punctuating it. He cannot adequately differentiate the undifferentiated flux of life about him. Eliot's early poems contrast Prufrock in turn with types like the man in "Portrait of A Lady," who is most comfortable when he is removed from any kind of immediate experience, preferring the mediated world of newspapers to human contact of any kind. Only the barbaric personae like Sweeney are capable of dealing with immediate experience, and only then because they don't have the necessary intelligence to understand or value such experience precisely because they cannot reflect critically upon their own activity.

Eliot does escape subjectivity as he matures as a poet, but he does so only by rendering it in more mythopoetic fashion in such poems as "Gerontion" and "The Hollow Men." The adulteration of life that Gerontion speaks of leads to the complete incarnation of absence in the fifth section of "Hollow Men":

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow [12]

Reading these lines, one sees that Eliot has simply written a description of human finitude, but his despair makes clear that he refuses to accept the shadow that such finitude implies. The shadow has always fallen between idea and reality simply because man cannot transcend his finitude, cannot, because he is *in* the world, encompass the world through his consciousness, which always remains part of the world it is trying to encompass. The poem implies an Edenic state from which mankind has degenerated, a "dissociation of sensibility" which brings

[12] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1971), p. 59.

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absence and violence into a world that could conceivably exist without them.

Given Eliot's unwillingness to accept human finitude, it is easy to see why he ultimately converted: the distance between the shadow and the light simply became too much for him to bear; he could not accept the fact that immediate experience involved itself in absence as well as presence. "The Waste Land" does suggest glimmers of light—the pure voice of Philomel, the scene at Emmaus, the Tristan and Isolde passage—and Eliot clearly shows this light to be at the same time connected to the shadow—the violence of Philomel's rape, the death following transfiguration, and so on—but the ambiguities inherent in this view of the world seem to have been too much for Eliot to hold together without a religious framework.

Eliot's movement toward a totally absence-oriented world, then, is stayed by his conversion, and the post-conversion poetry offers a scenario which corresponds to Williams' final poems. Eliot demonstrates again and again in poems like "Four Quartets" that his conversion did not lead to a world of pure presence, that even a Christian had to deal with the absence in the world. The problem is attacked in many ways, but the most obvious are the scenes of purity and innocence that are not totally pure and innocent. The childhood garden in "Burnt Norton" and the rustic marriage ceremony in "East Coker" both represent supposed states of purity, but the purity cannot overcome the "Dung and death" to which it is attached. For Eliot the only difference between the rustic and the modern is that the rustic's ceremonies demonstrate that he accepted the connection between life and death, presence and absence, while modern man continually tries to escape that connection.

"Four Quartets" offers a world which is composed of both the "primitive terror" of absence and the "Love" or "Incarnation" of presence, a world in which there are moments

> . . .surrounded
> By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving
> *Erhebung* without motion, concentration
> Without elimination, both a new world
> And the old made explicit, understood
> In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
> The resolution of its partial horror.[13]

[13] Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 119.

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We see the "white light" that transcends the primitive terror, the "partial horror" of original sin and death, and this leads to "both a new world/And the old made explicit, understood," but the white light always remains connected to the primitive terror.

Both "Four Quartets" and Eliot's total poetic career demonstrate the same attitude toward human experience: man must experience his world immediately if he is to understand it, and this way of experiencing the world leads inevitably to a recognition of man's finitude. In a poem like the "Quartets" these interrelated processes are developed through the attempt to write a poem about immediate experience and then through the way in which the poem is written. The undifferentiated composite of light and shadow, life and death, is present on the structural level by the need of the poet to recapitulate again and again the same kind of experience through different perspectives in order to show that no single perspective is adequate in itself. In terms of Eliot's entire career, we see the same movement in that Eliot begins by locating undifferentiated experience and finitude in two different realms, but, through his continual attempts to understand the undifferentiated, he comes to see the inextricable link between it and human finitude, he comes to see that the shadow of absence is as much a part of the undifferentiated as is the light of presence, and he comes to see that man must accept this fact if his beliefs are to correspond to his experiences. As we found in "Asphodel," Eliot also ultimately recognizes the paradoxical need for a description of the world that entails both presence and absence while giving priority to presence. It is a paradox Eliot saw from the beginning, but one that he accepted only with his conversion.

To be sure, Eliot's Christianity, his emphasis on tradition, and his poetic technique all serve to differentiate him quite thoroughly from Williams. While their interpretations of their poetry and their experiences were quite different, however, they were finally concerned with the same fundamental human and poetic problems, and their attitude toward these problems reflects their modernity. The emphasis on immediate experience, the lifelong process of trying to understand the relationship between presence and absence, and the ultimately paradoxical perception that both presence and absence are part of the same undifferentiated experience are at the root of both men's work. Similarly, while both poets were more concerned with the effects of language on their experience than most of the poets who preceded them, neither of them ends up in a linguistic universe which

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is totally shaped by the words one uses to order it. Indeed, rather than arguing for the ultimate power of language over their lives, they seem more inclined to show how inadequate language is for describing the world in which they live. Rather than reveling in the play of language, they are intent upon showing its inherent limitations in describing the experience that always partially transcends its grasp.

But if their world is not the linguistically based space of absence, neither is it, in the end, a space of pure presence or Being. One of the ideas the modern poets went to great lengths to discount was the time and place of innocence, of pure presence. For them that is no more adequate a way of describing the world than is the description of absence. Instead, they chose to live with the paradox of a movement between presence and absence, a movement of hope and clearing that is modulated by the limitations of man's finitude. It is perhaps too confining a world for some and too naive for others, but it is the world that Eliot, Williams and the other moderns shared—at least it is the world of their poetry.

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RICHARD WASWO*

The "Autonomy of Art" is a Wish, Not a Fact

From the Renaissance to the present day, various versions of the "autonomy of art" have been continually presented as ways to liberate both the producers and consumers of art as well as to legitimize the activity of its professional students. Observing these analogous functions of the doctrine in its recent and Renaissance forms, I shall argue that it is the tactical expression of a desire—not a statement of fact—and is therefore an object of interpretation, not its means or principle. Failure to recognize this distinction has historically resulted in the multiplication of false theoretical oppositions. Though the doctrine is and was intended to apply to all the arts, my examples will mainly concern literature and literary theory, which is and was the area of the most articulate and energetic debate.

The fullest flowering of the doctrine in the slogan *l'art pour l'art* is the product of one of the most potent biological metaphors by means of which the nineteenth century saw itself as the heir of the Renaissance. Predicated on the eighteenth-century discovery of "aesthetic experience" as distinct both from cognition and ordinary life, the burgeoning new field of aesthetics found the seeds of its own development in various assertions and achievements of the Renaissance.[1] The period's art, in short, was seen as emancipating itself from medieval constraints and acquiring value for its own sake; no longer bound merely to serve theology, metaphysics, or ethics, art of all kinds could begin its triumphant march toward pure Crocean hedonism.[2]

The primary agent of this metamorphosis was often taken to be the consequently much-studied phenomenon of neoplatonism. In particular there was its doctrine of divine inspiration or poetic furor, of which

* Richard Waswo is on the faculty at the Université de Genève and is the author of *The Fatal Mirror*, a study of Fulke Greville's poetry.

[1] A full history of Kant's subjectivist aesthetic and its critique in twentieth-century phenomenology is given by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 39-90.

[2] This view is still widely accepted by Italian scholars: see the essays of Umberto Eco, "Sviluppo dell'estetica medievale," Antonio Viscardi, "Idee estetiche e letteratura militante nel Medioevo," and Cesare Vasoli, "L'estetica dell'Umanesimo e del Rinascimento," in *Momenti e Problemi di Storia dell'Estetica* I (Milan: Marzorati, 1968).

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Ernst Curtius wrote: "As it did with so many other coinages of the Greek spirit, the Middle Ages took this one from late Rome, preserved it, and copied it to the letter, until the creative Eros of the Italian Renaissance reawakened the spirit in the letter."[3] In general there was its conception of self-realizing form, most cogently explicated and traced in both art and science by Ernst Cassirer. With clear historical self-consciousness he found that the Renaissance dissolution of the bond between the beautiful and the good "paved the way for the autonomy of aesthetics, which then received its theoretical foundation more than three centuries later."[4] Though some Renaissance poets indeed claimed divine inspiration, and though some thinkers indeed labored to legitimize artistic creation per se, we may still profitably inquire to what extent their efforts justify the "autonomy" attributed to them by a much later aesthetic, as well as question what kind of "autonomy" this is and whence it derives.

In our own time the notion of autonomy has become over-extended in circumstances and with results analogous to those that prevailed during the Renaissance. Paul O. Kristeller was voicing a cherished assumption of current liberal arts education when he praised the period for discovering "the autonomy of *culture*" (my italics), that is, its existence and pursuit independent of religious and political developments.[5] Both the nostalgic tone and the self-defensiveness of this posture are direct descendants of the way in which Renaissance humanists defined themselves as guardians of humane letters against the narrow aridity of scholastic logic on the one hand, and the godless materialism of Averroistic science on the other. For the modern student of the "humanities," only the names have changed and the enemies list grown somewhat larger: we suffer not only the narrow, moralistic utilitarianism of the philistines on the one hand, and the supposedly valueless empiricism of sciences (and the social sciences) on the other, but the additional predations of educationist administrators, interfering politicians, and occasionally revolutionary students. (Though we should recall that neither the middle ages nor the Renaissance was

[3] *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Willard Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1953), p. 475.

[4] *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, tr. Mario Domandi (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 163.

[5] *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 94. The context of the remark is an unfavorable contrast between Renaissance 'culture' and that of the present.

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unprovided with reactionary university authorities, capricious princes, and often rebellious students.) This beleaguered but not unflattering self-image of the Renaissance humanist has produced in his modern epigone virtually the identical kind of tone and tactics: an admiring nostalgia for a remote past felt as superior to, and used to criticize, the present and the more immediate past is focused upon the verbal and artistic expression of the remote period, resulting in a programme to recover or revive its forms of expression in some supposedly purified state.[6] The Renaissance revivification of Ciceronian Latin along with the whole question of etymological purity in the use of words finds a modern parallel in the efforts of many latter-day humanists to preserve the very term "culture" (in its deific Arnoldian sense of high cultivation and refined artistic achievement) from its more inclusive and relativistic use in anthropology.[7]

The self-legitimation and self-protection (if not self-aggrandizement) of this humanist posture, then and now, is obvious. The professional *laudator temporis acti* asserts the autonomy of culture against other interests, tastes, and forces that seem to threaten him: formal logicians or mindless empiricists, tyrannical rulers or Senator Joe McCarthy. The threats may be real or imagined; the point is that in either case what is asserted as a desideratum is thereby revealed to be most emphatically not a fact. Culture, even in the deific sense, is never autonomous. Neither its existence (the production of art objects) nor its pursuit (their appreciation or study) is ever independent of social pressures. To seek freedom from some particular form of iniquitous

[6] The general attitude, for example, of Petrarch's famous avowal in his "Epistle to Posterity"—"I devoted myself ... to the study of ancient times, since I always disliked our own period ... and I always tried to transport myself mentally to other times," *Letters from Petrarch*, tr. Morris Bishop (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 5-6—is shared by Douglas Bush when he recommends Renaissance literature to "modern readers" who, thanks to it, "can at least live part of their lives in a finer air than their own," *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 424. Hardin Craig, one of the pioneer historicist critics of the period, frankly averred that modern philosophy "lacks the unity, the integration, the intelligible practicality of the philosophy of the Renaissance," *The Enchanted Glass* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), p. 264.

[7] Though this battle is long lost, it leaves traces: see the account of Benjamin Nelson and Charles Trinkaus of why Jacob Burckhardt's *Kultur* was translated as 'civilization' in the title of his great work, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Harper, 1958), Introduction, I, 6-7.

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control is understandable and necessary; to generalize an argument for such freedom into a concept that guides interpretation and historical investigation is utterly fallacious. The actual situation was finely summarized by R. R. Bolgar at the end of his magisterial survey of classical learning in the West:

> It was always some urgent practical need that set the scholars to their task and gave their curiosity . . . a definite and fruitful purpose. It was always some practical need, to preserve some desired *status quo*, that acted as a bar to the pursuit of researches which went beyond what was immediately useful. The history of learning is not a free field. It is the history of society.[8]

The neglect of this obvious truth has emerged as the most glaring theoretical weakness in the largely formalist orientation of most modern criticism of both literature and visual art.[9] Such an orientation is obliged to assume, if not explicitly to defend, the "autonomy" of the art object.[10] In the sustained assaults that formalism has lately undergone, especially in literary theory, the autonomous art object has been an early casualty. Or so it would appear at first glance, when the formerly sacrosanct "text" is offered by Derrida as something for the reader to deconstruct or by Barthes as something that deconstructs itself, or by Kristeva as something that reflects the infinite possibilities of all language.[11] Moreover, the structuralists are highly

[8] *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1954), p. 379.

[9] Although Arnold Hauser's full-scale polemic for the sociological and psychological causation of stylistic change in art, *The Philosophy of Art History* (London: Routledge, 1959), has not found particular favor among art historians, some of his principle positions have been silently incorporated in later work: his attack on Wölfflin's hypostatization of stylistic elements is continued by Michael Levey, *High Renaissaice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975). Hauser's insistence on relating style to a wider cultural context is partly reflected in the general approach of the whole Penguin series—*Style and Civilization*—to which Levey's volume belongs, and is further extended in the approach of Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

[10] The profound theoretical difficulties of defining these objects, particularly in the attempt to give them some distinctive ontological status, are revealed by Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

[11] The development of French structuralism as it bears on literature is most informatively reviewed and sympathetically criticized by Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975).

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sensitive to the operation of ideologies, that is, of socio-linguistically imposed patterns of significance, in interpretation. In fact, the whole thrust of their programme is precisely to escape from such impositions by becoming aware of their "operative conventions."[12] Recognizing the actual impossibility of escape either from history or language, structuralist (or more accurately, post-structuralist) criticism seeks nonetheless to imagine or dream the escape partly by regarding the text as merely a nest of self-referring codes. The text is described in metaphors that postulate its absolute indeterminacy: Barthes' onion of many layers but no center, Kristeva's mirror that reflects whatever is before it, J. Hillis Miller's host/parasite that feeds on and begets other texts.[13] Interpretation consequently becomes the reader's account of his own process of reading; indeed, the liberation of the reader's creative freedom is a primary goal.

To pursue it, however, by asserting the indeterminacy of the text, or of a body of texts called literature, is to preserve almost intact the kind of "autonomy" demanded by traditional formalism. Indeterminacy itself—the quality of being without limits—is surely autonomy of a high order. For the *nouvelle critique*, literature is finally independent of everything except the reader, whose paradoxical task becomes to recognize but "resist" (Derrida's term) the conventions operative in his own language and that of the text. Though the humanist posture, largely shared by (now old) Anglo-American New Criticism, was one of reverence toward the text, the general tone of much of the *nouvelle critique* is designedly irreverent. Though the humanist worships the ancient, the post-structuralist enthusiastically defends the modern.[14] But both assert or assume the existence of texts independent of an historical or linguistic context that could control their interpretation. Functionally, each theory requires us to ignore or to "resist" any such context; that the *nouvelle critique* at least acknowledges its existence, whereas the New Criticism had officially to deny it (often while admitting it in practice), seems to

[12] Culler, pp. 252-53.

[13] On Barthes and Kristeva: Culler, pp. 259, 246-47; Miller, "The Critic as Host," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (1977), 439-47.

[14] See Frank Kermode's refutation of Barthes' falsely chronological distinction between "lisible" and "scriptible" texts, in which he also observes that much structuralist theory is in fact a polemic against academic criticism: "The Use of the Codes," in *Approaches to Poetics*, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 78-79.

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make little difference at the conceptual level.[15] Again, an argument for freedom—of the text or of the reader—generates a desideratum, manifestly not a fact, that is then regarded as a characteristic of the object itself. Again, the polemical posture moves from self-legitimation to self-aggrandizement much more overtly for the post-structuralists than for the humanist: he was but the keeper of the flame; they have become its creators.[16]

But we are still assured that formalism, and with it the autonomy of art, is dead.[17] It is important to observe that such reports may be slightly premature in order to recognize in these discussions the persistence of false oppositions that echo back to the Renaissance and beyond: ancient *versus* modern, words *versus* matter, aesthetic appreciation *versus* historical knowledge. The polemical exigencies of particular times and places have repeatedly misconstrued as contradictory what in fact are complementary. This is fatally easy to do because the ordinary use of opposition, of course, includes both kinds of relation: there are opposites that are mutually exclusive (that is, genuinely contradictory, like open-shut, black-white), and there are opposites that are mutually implicative (like the two sides of a coin, or a street).[18] The relation between the opposites of the first class, though it may exhibit degrees, is such that they cannot exist at the same time with respect to the same object; the relation between those of the second class is that they must: we cannot have one without simultaneously having the other. When relations of the second sort are mistaken for the first, enemies are made of complementarities whose necessary interaction is thus reduced to mere hostility and erroneously

[15] The nature and the extent of the New Critics' 'formalism' was an issue in a recent argument between René Wellek and Gerald Graff—*Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1979), 569-79—in which Graff observes, citing R. S. Crane, that polemical tactics, however necessary, "should not be permitted to dictate our understanding of what literature is" (574).

[16] It is probably no accident that the most radical theories of textual indeterminacy, as well as some of the most extravagant polemical gestures, should come from France, where the opposition, in the form of a centralized educational system that dispenses a fairly rigid canon of literary texts along with traditionally canonized judgments upon them, is a good deal more entrenched and monolithic than in America, Britain, or Germany.

[17] It is even possible nowadays merely to assume this and go on to review the alternatives, as Edward Wasiolek does in "Wanted: a New Contextualism," *Critical Inquiry*, 1 (1975), 623-39.

[18] A much more elaborate and precise classification may be found in C. K. Ogden's still useful *Opposition* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967).

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generalized as contradiction. The perception of difference, by which we know all things, is mistaken for antagonism.[19] The ancient is only knowable in terms of the modern, and vice-versa. Words do not exclude the "matter" they are often said to express; they make its expression possible. And because they do, attention to the patterns they form (aesthetic appreciation) does not preclude attention to the historical contexts in which they function. Both kinds of attention are required by the same object, the text, and are part of the same process, interpretation.[20]

For this reason, any theory of literature that exalts one part of the process at the expense of the other, or any theory of language that severs words from "matter," or any theory of culture that uses one epoch as a stick to beat another, mistakes the nature of the phenomenon it purports to explain simply by leaving out, if not denigrating, one of its constituent parts. Hence it requires, and will inevitably receive, correction from a counter-theory that in its turn will cry up the omitted or denigrated part. The trouble with this procedure is that it never gets anywhere; like a seesaw it remains forever fixed in the same place, one end going up as the other comes down. The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, for example, since its reinvigoration on a variety of fronts during the Renaissance, is certainly one of the most unproductive arguments in the history of thought—except at those moments when it provokes parody or satire, like Swift's *Battle of the Books*.[21] Whenever veneration of past models gives way to prescription of rigid limits on present activities, the modern will quite naturally protest his liberty by attacking what would

[19] Walter J. Ong points out that the venerable 'opposition,' subjective–objective, is similarly ill-founded. Of the sense of touch he writes: "When I feel this objective something 'out there,' beyond the bounds of my own body, I also at the same instant experience my own self. I feel other and self simultaneously. This is how I can differentiate them." *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p. 170.

[20] I am here summarizing points demonstrated in a different way by John M. Ellis, *The Theory of Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1974), pp. 146, 203, et passim.

[21] An excellent analysis of the quarrel, which makes clear the various self-contradictions on both sides and urges its importance as the inadvertent discovery of historicism, is given by Hans Robert Jauss, "Aesthetische Normen und geschichtliche Reflexion in der 'Quedelle des Anciens et des Modernes,'" as the introduction to Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1964), pp. 8-64.

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constrain it. If the modern is sufficiently absolute in his claim to freedom, the defender of the ancient will be able to retort that some constraints are necessary if one is to be merely intelligible. The understanding of the subjects at issue is not advanced by such embattlement, which must conceive as separate and opposed what in fact can only exist as functions of each other.

The case is the same in formalist theories of art that postulate its autonomy either to assert its value or to concentrate attention on its intrinsic qualities in reaction against theories that stressed its extrinsic ones, moral, historical, biographical, or whatever. Thus the old New Criticism has been opposed by theories that seek to bring back what it deliberately left out: authorial intention, the experience of the reader, historical contexts.[22] Thus the *nouvelle critique* is criticized for its lack of "principles of relevance," of norms or controls without which reading becomes impossible.[23] The effect of this seesaw motion is stated in formal terms by Arthur K. Moore's careful conclusion that such theories "appear to be individually defective and mutually invalidating." Whether old or new, Moore continues, theories of literature

> can never have been valuable as limiting concepts but only as propositions congenial to supervening cultural theories. As such, they have not been true warrants for methodical observation but, rather, dubious excuses for accommodating literature to various notions of the contemporary real. If analytical criticism has surpassed rank impressionism, the gains have been owing more to improved reading than to improved theory; for theory has most evidently provided a pretext rather than a regulative principle. In truth, the function of theory has usually been to determine literature as evidence or expression in relation to ideology and in some instances to provide such barriers to alien modes of inquiry as enable the critic to assume a priestly role and to mediate the mysteries of the literary imagination without serious competition.[24]

[22] The rich variety of these as well as other challenges is presented and debated at length by the international participants in the Bellagio Symposium of 1973, recorded in *New Literary History*, 7 (1975), 1-233.

[23] The quoted phrase is Culler's objection to Kristeva, p. 250; the general objection is fully deployed by Wayne C. Booth and M. H. Abrams in a recent symposium on "The Limits of Pluralism," printed in *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 407-38.

[24] *Contestable Concepts of Literary Theory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 209, 218. Independently of Moore and more brutally,

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The treatment implied by this diagnosis is not, as it might first tempt one to suppose, that theory be abolished, but that it begin from premises that do its subject fuller justice—premises that at least avoid cutting the subject up into falsely competing parts. Such premises have recently been developed for English readers by two seminal works that have emerged from very different traditions of thought: one from the linguistic analyses of the later Wittgenstein, the other from the social analyses of European Marxism.[25] More striking than the difference between their approaches or the disagreements these may imply is their common insistence on the nature of language and literature as social activities, their common denial of the formalist—historicist opposition, and their common perception that literary texts are simultaneously both the products and producers of the whole cultural community, past and present, in which they exist.[26] Such premises can indeed supply a "true warrant" for the accurate observation of what has been called the "dual status" of literary works as originating in the past and functioning in the present, thereby requiring for their interpretation the continual relation of formal features both to the history that produced the text and the history that the text, together with its generations of readers, produces.[27]

Ellis finds theoretical polemics between 1949 and 1974 "intolerable," resulting in "almost a spectator sport, rather than a field of inquiry," pp. 9-10. Grounds for this dismal view, if any are needed, may be found in a volume like *Art and Philosophy*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1966), which records a symposium among twenty-eight eminent critics, philosophers, art historians, and musicologists, in which all the respondents deny almost all the arguments in all the papers, no one can agree what "interpretation" is, and from which the only inference would appear to be, in the words of one exasperated participant, that "one can talk about art without being able to talk about the talk about art," p. 271.

[25] The first is Ellis; the second is Robert Weimann, *Structure and Society in Literary History* (Charlottesville, Va.: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1976).

[26] Weimann sees the relation between "past significance and present meaning," or *Entstehungsgeschichte* and *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as the central concern of literary study, pp. 14, 187. A similar emphasis on the historicity of understanding is found in German hermeneutics generally; cf. Gadamer's discussion of hermeneutic "application," i. e., the need to make past texts function in the present, pp. 289-324.

[27] To do justice to this "dual status" is the aim of Michael McCanles, *Dialectical Criticism and Renaissance Literature* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1975), who develops a concept of dialectic expressly to rectify the formalist—historicist 'opposition,' which he cogently reviews and criticizes: pp. 1-10, 227-28,

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Finally, such premises prevent us above all from isolating the text in some aesthetic never-never land, directing our attention instead to the whole "system of communication," the "social and linguistic conventions" within which alone the text is successively reinvested with meaning.[28]

It is in terms of such premises that we may examine the uneasily shifting linguistic conventions of the Renaissance system of communication that produced the first fully developed modern statements of the autonomy of art. Taking these assertions as objects of interpretation, we may perceive how they raised problems of evaluation that were not solvable in the available vocabulary of description. Renaissance presumptions of artistic autonomy asserted the dignity and value of poetry on two different, but often combined, grounds: its universality or its divine inspiration. I shall briefly examine each in turn.

That poetry contained all knowledge—the idea that was to produce all the later and popular systems of *theologia poetica*—was just what Dante had set out to demonstrate from his own lyrics in the *Convivio*. It was Dante's enthusiastic defender, Coluccio Salutati, who gave the idea systematic exposition in a huge treatise, begun in 1391 and concluded only by his death in 1406, aptly titled *De Laboribus Herculis*. Salutati begins by straightforwardly lifting poetry out of its traditional subordinate place in medieval education (where it was but a branch of grammar). He declares that poetry (specifically "poeticam narrationem") includes, uses, and explicates not only the trivium and quadrivium but also all philosophy; hence it is greatest in dignity. The unique means by which poetry achieves this status is specified in Salutati's definition of the true function of the poet: to designate one thing by another ("vero officium poetarum est per unam rem aliud designare").[29] It is quite simply the use of symbols, whereby one thing stands for or represents ("sumitur" and "ponitur" are the usual terms) something else, that liberates poetry from

241-73. McCanles acknowledges a specific debt to the first essay in Weimann's book, "Past Significance and Present Meaning in Literary History," which had previously appeared in *New Literary History*, 1 (1969).

[28] See Ellis, pp. 142-46.

[29] Ed. B. L. Ullman, 2 vols. (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1951), p. 19. Poetry also contains all the normative Pythagorean proportions, all harmony celestial and mundane, p. 23.

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grammar and rhetoric and constitutes its own proper art.[30] Any use of language that can be construed to employ a "simulacrum"—a likeness, figure, imitation, representation, shadow—is, for Salutati, poetry. In his way he is able to buttress its dignity by locating its origin exactly 235 years after the creation of the world [Gen. 4: 26]: when Enos called the name of the Lord, he must have done so in figurative words that signified something else, since human invention could not find the "proper terms" for the inexpressible.[31] Having provided these impeccable Christian credentials for it, Salutati can proceed to find poetry everywhere, identified and justified at once by the ancient expedient of allegorical interpretation. To cite Augustine and to find in the mythological fables of ancient poets foreshadowings of Christian truth is only the beginning, for if poetry is to be really universal, it must symbolize everything. Thus Christian allegories combine freely with Euhemeristic, moral, psychological, and scientific ones. Poetical narratives about Jupiter, for example, use him to 'represent' a man, a star, air, fire, a natural or supernatural force, the will of God, fortune, the rational will.[32] Anything is grist for such a mill, Dante and Petrarch as well as Homer and Virgil; Salutati can go on indefinitely (and did so until he died), shucking away the husk of the fable to reveal its inner kernel of truth. Though his claims are extreme—few other humanists if any wished to give poetry so high a station—his procedures are exemplary of the whole tradition that valued poetry as the symbolic vehicle of some universal theology, from Fulgentius on Virgil nine centuries before to the Florentine Academicians on Petrarch a century after.

It was a bold stroke of Salutati's to attempt to supply poetry with its own "proper art" in order to qualify it for autonomous existence in the noetic economy of the day. But it was neither cogent nor convincing, since the "art" he selected—the figurative use of words—served merely to perpetuate, by vastly expanding, the entire medieval view of poetry as instrumental to something else. Although he enlarged the scope of both the method (admitting all kinds of alle-

[30] Ibid., p. 72.

[31] "Nam cum scriptum sit Enos incepisse vocare nomen domini, nec possibile sit propriis et humane inventionis vocabulis de deo loqui, quoniam, cum undique infinitus et inerrabilis sit, a nobis explicari non possit, figuratis et aliud ab eo significantibus verbis procul dubio fuit illa vocatio; ut ex tunc fas sit dicere nostram . . . poeticam incepisse." Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[32] Ibid., pp. 87-108.

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gories, not just the ethical) and the material to which it applied (modern poets as well as ancient), it seems impossible to regard such an increase as an "innovation."[33] It is simply more of the same very old thing. The mere multiplicity of significations that Salutati permits does not at all endow poetry with its own "free" mode of operation;[34] because that operation is both defined and described as figurative speech in traditional Augustinian terms, it remains bound to serve and to mean—by standing for—something else.[34] Poetry is universal not by virtue of working in any new or distinctive way, but by sharing the old operation attributed to language itself: it can be a container of anything.

Although this old kind of universality fails, both logically and in practice, to secure the desired "autonomy," what seems new—and what seems to have misled earlier scholars who were looking for a concept of aesthetics as well as more recent investigators in search of a new consciousness of language—is of course the desire itself. Salutati appears to want something that his whole traditional vocabulary of discourse cannot provide. He wants to reverse an order of value, to defend and legitimize poetry, including that in the modern vernacular; but he is hampered by the terms and assumptions of referential speech, which persist in conceiving as instrumental what he wishes to be self-justifying. In this situation he is again exemplary of subsequent generations of Renaissance thinkers, some of whom will find different means to assert the revaluation of literature, but who will generally continue the partisan warfare of crying up one branch of *studia humanitatis* at the expense of others without ever becoming fully aware of their linguistic premises. It is in this context that assertions of autonomy arise, which should make clear that to revalue something is by no means necessarily to reconsider it.

Certainly no reconsideration was made possible by the other major means of revaluation, the revived doctrine of divine inspiration. Whatever the psychological interest or classical prestige of this idea, its usefulness to defend and legitimize artistic creation was obvious and extreme: it put the issue beyond debate altogether. By assuring autonomy for art on the basis of its origin, there was no need to

[33] As does Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness* (London: Constable, 1970), II, 703.

[34] As is claimed by Nancy S. Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 51, 75.

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redefine its operation. The latter could continue to be described, with the same consequences as for Salutati, in the instrumental vocabulary of traditional rhetoric.

These consequences are most apparent in the work of the Pléiade, the group that made the fullest and most concerted use of divine fury in order "to free poetry from the obligation of conforming to extra-poetical scales of value."[35] Grahame Castor has demonstrated how this emphasis arose from the difficulty of using the inherited instrumental terms—invention, imagination, imitation—to assert the intrinsic, autonomous worth of poetry. "The concepts which the Pléiade had to use in presenting their case were still part of the system in which... the poet's true situation was in doubt."[36] To invent what was there before; to imagine what could never be; to imitate what really existed somewhere else—whether all these activities were construed in Platonic or newly fashionable Aristotelian ways, all placed the poet at a great ontological and epistemological disadvantage to other advocates of humane letters. But such inferiority was reversed at a stroke by regarding the poet as a classical or Christianized *vates*: his claim to a higher kind of truth than that attainable by the philosopher or historian became inviolable, while his language remained comfortably explicable by the same rhetoric as theirs. Thus Pierre de Ronsard, after insisting that the muses only inspire the noblest souls with the loftiest conceptions, is careful to stress that their expression is not random nor "fantastic" but rather "well-ordered and disposed" by all the embellishing techniques of elocution.[37] Thus Pontus de Tyard is careful to distinguish

[35] Grahame Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 24, 199.

[36] Ibid., p. 185. The contradictions between theories of inspiration and the whole Horatian tradition of conscious rhetorical skill were apparent throughout the period; they are well described by Henri Weber, *La Création poétique au XVIe siècle en France* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1956), I, Ch. 3, who observes that "Quand les poètes de la Pléiade ont cherché à concilier théoriquement... l'imitation et l'inspiration... ils ont abouti plutôt à d'ingénieux artifices qu'à des conseils pratiques et efficaces," p. 160.

[37] "Abbregé de l'Art poëtique françois" (1565), in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Paul Laumonier (Paris: Didier, 1949), XIV, 5, 13-15. The ambivalence of the concept of 'imitation,' which Ronsard takes in the Platonic sense, is apparent throughout the treatise along with his effort to push the old derivative notion of 'invention' toward its modern, creative sense by requiring the poet "inventer de nouveau," p. 35.

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"furie" (mental disease) from "fureur" (the four variants of which he borrows from the *Phaedrus*), and to declare at length that the poetic variant includes the study of all arts and sciences.[38] In such ways as these was the divine fury tamed for drawing-room rhetorical presentation.[39] Though it was an impressive polemical weapon for poetry-lovers (and writers), it offered no alternative to the traditional instrumental vocabulary of discourse, but merely an escape hatch from the valuation that vocabulary assumed.

It was of course in the nature of the case that inspired language was hardly discernible from any other kind. One could demonstrate interminably how much wisdom poetry contained (and could urge this *copia* as evidence of inspiration); but one remained unable to verify its source. Similarly, we can today read hundreds of invocations to the muses without being able to discover in the poems themselves any particular use of language, any concrete effect, that seems to require production by a muse instead of a person. The only possible Renaissance exception to this rule that I know of is the verse of John Milton. Milton, in contrast to other poets who dutifully or polemically courted the muse, appears genuinely to have believed himself a *vates*, that is, thoroughly Christian prophet, and to have produced verse that is "unpremeditated" in ways that no formal rhetoric can fathom.[40] Such an exception, however, resulting from the psychological force

[38] *Solitaire Premier* (1522), ed. S. F. Baridon (Geneva: Droz, 1950). Tyard's exposition, of course, combines the dignity of inspiration with that of universality in the systematic neoplatonic association of the muses, graces, and planets with intellectual disciplines (the trivium and quadrivium) and harmonic modes. The whole reproduces with a few additions (and the omission of the angelic orders) the universal system of the *Convivio* (II. 6). Numerous diagrams that illustrate such omnivorous poetic theology are reproduced and discussed by S. K. Heninger, Jr., *The Cosmographical Glass* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1977), Ch. 4.

[39] Orpheus himself, one of the favorite topoi in the polemic, became domesticated in the pragmatic Ciceronian ethics of humanist pedagogy as the vehicle of the wisdom/eloquence equation, a useful example for schoolboys and preachers: see Kirsty Cochrane, "Orpheus Applied: Some Instances of his Importance in the Humanist View of Language," *Review of English Studies*, 19 (1968), 1-13.

[40] That he did so is the erudite and persuasive argument of William Kerrigan, *The Prophetic Milton* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1974). In addition to a comprehensive history of conceptions of prophetic inspiration, Kerrigan offers cogent evidence from the procedure of the poems: see especially his analysis of temporal structure in *Samson Agonistes*, Ch. 5.

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of an individual's life and beliefs, can provide no exit from the theoretical cul-de-sac in which Renaissance writers found themselves when they asserted the intrinsic worth of poetry in a terminological system that implicitly denied it. What an individual impelled by powerful convictions may accomplish is, for better or worse, not dependent on their conceptual coherence or explanatory usefulness.

That poetry symbolizes all knowledge, or that it is divinely inspired (or both together, with either as cause of the other) are proposals for the revaluation of verbal art, not principles that can guide its study or explain its operation. The kind of autonomy claimed by such proposals in the exigencies of controversy is not to be found and remains in the proposals themselves contradicted by the analytical methods and concepts employed.[41] Allegorical interpretation made poetry a slave, imitation made it a secondhand copy, and elocution made it a schoolroom exercise; inspiration did not alter the theory of these operations, it just gave them a magical truth-sanction. The Renaissance lover of literature perceived in the allegories that poets actually composed, in the imitations they practiced, in the techniques of elocution they used, a new value that the received theories of these matters could not justify. It is not merely that in virtually all the literary and artistic debates of the Renaissance there was "a notable discrepancy between theory and practice,"[42] but that the theories themselves postulated the autonomy of art as a rather desperate attempt to protect it from relations that had come to seem threatening.

The impulse that would "save" poetry from drowning in grammar perhaps no less sympathetic than that which would preserve it from indifference or neglect in a technological society. But the tactics employed, then and now, to make of art a self-sufficient and unlimited absolute—whether by association with the God of the Renaissance or with the indeterminacy of post-structuralism—falsify the very conditions of its existence as a human product and institution.

[41] "Autonomy" is manifestly not sustainable even in the exceptional case. If Urania did in fact pour *Paradise Lost* nightly into Milton's ear, his verse still remains less amenable to pure "aesthetic" treatment—one of the reasons why many twentieth-century formalists have so disliked it—and more deeply involved in the revolutionary events of his own life and time than that of any other poet.

[42] This is the amply documented judgment of John M. Steadman, *The Lamb and the Elephant: Ideal Imitation and the Context of Renaissance Allegory* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1974), pp. viii, 236.

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The practical need to save art from its (ostensible) enemies has repeatedly generated theories that require it also to be saved from its friends. Its salvation—and whether this is even necessary is a large and open question—is not to be achieved by absorbing it into an infinity that is either beyond argument (in the case of God) or beyond the possibility of meaningful argument (in the case of indeterminacy). To recognize the fallacy of autonomy is to insist on exploring all the relations of art with the forms of life from which it takes its energy and of which it enriches, reorders, makes possible our perception.

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ROSE A. ZAK*

Dialogue and Discourse in Stravinsky's "Symphony of Psalms"

Even before Koussevitsky, in 1929, had commissioned Igor Stravinsky to compose a symphonic work celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Stravinsky "had had the psalm symphony idea in mind for some time."[1] Thus, he seized the commission as an opportunity to develop this idea.

From its inception, the *Symphony of Psalms* has existed as an inseparable unity of text and music. The element characterizing this unity is dialogue, resonating in patterns of invocation and response in the psalms, and in structures of repetition and variation in the music. Dialogue is conceptualized even in the most basic choral structure of the *Symphony of Psalms*. As Stravinsky "intended it to be a work of considerable contrapuntal development, he decided to choose 'a choral and instrumental ensemble in which the two elements should be on an equal footing, neither of them outweighing the other.'"[2]

The idea of dialogue embodied in the *Symphony of Psalms* reflects Stravinsky's conclusion, as stated in his *Poetics of Music*, that music "comes to reveal itself as a form of communion with our fellow man—and with the Supreme Being."[3] Stravinsky seems to have been fascinated with the intersection of music and religious language: as a motto for a book of interviews with Robert Craft, he "adopts Kassner's phrase, 'In the Kingdom of the Father, there is no drama but only dialogue, which is disguised monologue.'"[4] Indeed, the preface to the *Symphony of Psalms* is a symbolic projection of Stravinsky's religious/musical concept of dialogue: "Cette symphonie

* Rose Zak is a lecturer at Boston College.

[1] Robert Craft and Igor Stravinsky, *Dialogues and a Diary* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 44.

[2] Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1966), p. 321.

[3] Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard Univ. 1939-40, trans. Arthur Knodell and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 187.

[4] Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, trans. Frederick and Ann Fuller, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 156.

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composée à la gloire de DIEU est dediée au 'Boston Symphony Orchestra' à l'occasion du cinquaintenaire de son existence."

Stravinsky's choosing the Psalms as a topic was a reaction to his publisher's request that he write "something popular" for the B.S.O. celebration. Stravinsky chose to interpret "popular" as "something universally admired." The universality of the Psalms enables them to become vehicles for the musical "communion" that Stravinsky strove for. (Stravinsky had rejected merely subjective interpretation of the Psalms; in discussing his choice, he admitted "another and equally compelling reason was my eagerness to counter the many composers who had abused these majesterial verses as pegs for their own lyrico-sentimental feelings." [5])

The Psalms, having achieved a cultural permanence beyond their liturgical function, exist as structures of essential human response. They play a powerful role in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Stravinsky's terms, they exceed the limits of convention:

> Conventions differ from traditions in that they are modified rather than developed, and in that they are tied to this or that time, whereas traditions, as major lines of descent, are timeless. Traditions may be thought of as the universal and hard facts of art, conventions as the local and the soft facts.[6]

A further preface to the *Symphony of Psalms*, "Le texte des Psaumes, qui est celui de la Vulgate, se chantera toujours en latin," reinforces Stravinsky's perception of the cultural permanence of the Psalms. By commanding that their performance be restricted to Latin—he abandoned an initial attempt to compose using a Slavonic text—Stravinsky acknowledged the role of the Psalms in the religious tradition of the West: the Psalms have exceeded their Hebrew context, and in this sense are made more accessible in Latin. They are thus preserved beyond the changing connotations of a modern language. For Stravinsky, Latin was "a medium not dead, but turned to stone and so monumentalized as to have become immune from all risk of vulgarization." [7] Using Latin thus minimized the risk of possible misreadings. Yet, as a language, Latin itself is highly connotative, "a

[5] Craft and Stravinsky, *Dialogues*, p. 44.

[6] Robert Craft and Igor Stravinsky, *Themes and Episodes* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), p. 112.

[7] Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936), p. 196.

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form of language bearing the tradition of the ages, a language which may be called homologous." [8] Thus, Stravinsky believed he had found an adequate means of representation: "Cast in an immutable mold which adequately expresses their value, they (the words) do not require any further commentary." [9]

The text of the *Symphony of Psalms* is fixed in a position removed from both its original language and also from any more "current" language. As religious language, however, it remains odd, special, highly allusive, yet culturally accessible.

The Book of Psalms is unusual in scripture, as it is composed of individual poems, of specifically lyric poetry expressing various aspects of the relationship of humanity to God. The Psalms existed as oral poetry; they were set to the music of Hebrew celebration and daily life, and became the hymnbook of the pre-Christian Jewish liturgy. The Psalms manifest the communal or cultic transformation of a personal, lyric utterance into the expression of a corporate heart. Thus, the Book of Psalms can be interpreted as an account of the "I/Thou" dialogue of the corporate person Israel.

Christian interpretations of the Psalms are complicated by the New Testament's distancing the Old Testament into "Revelation History." If the Psalms are read only as indices to an epoch of Hebrew history, they must become allegorical and relegated to the realm of historical narrative. For example, R.B.Y. Scott claims,

> They speak in the language of the ancient time and of the different circumstances in which they were written. They represent an earlier stage of revelation and faith. Of necessity, therefore, they fall short at many points of the fullness of Christian understanding .... As Christians, we must read their words in a new way, because in Christ all things are become new.[10]

(That is, the Psalms retain historical and poetic value, but without Christ as the illuminating center, they are incapable of "evoking disclosure" in the Christian liturgy.) C. S. Lewis, in *Reflections on the Psalms*, is sceptical that the Psalms' role as retrospective prophecy is

[8] Ibid., pp. 206-207.
[9] Ibid., p. 202.
[10] R. B. Y. Scott, *The Psalms as Christian Praise* (New York: Association Press, 1958), p. 64.

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valid, and argues against a hidden meaning manifested only in the events of Christian history:

> They have been alleged to contain a second or hidden meaning, an "allegorical" sense, concerned with the central truths of Christianity .... The full significance of what the writers are saying is, on this view, apparent only in the light of events which happened after they were dead.[11]

The Psalms may be seen as a lyrically interpretive prophecy of the life of Christ, but their function in contemporary liturgical structures affirms their role as providing a space for dialogue rather than for narrative. In the *Symphony of Psalms*, Stravinsky stresses the discursive possibilities in his choice of psalms. More recent psalm scholars have argued that the Psalms, after Christ, still function as vehicles for dialogue between humanity and God (Jahweh *and* Christ). The lyric evocation of personal relationship is still perceived as present in the Psalms: "they are not merely historical documents, but they remain alive for us, they are still able to build a bridge between God and ourselves."[12] This bridge is built of language, a mediating system which in liturgy frequently clarifies the use of non-verbal symbols. In the Roman Catholic liturgy, for example, the "responsorial psalm" between two scripture readings functions as a space in which intercourse is possible in verbal terms. This space is, in a sense, Ong's "*word*," a moment in an age-old exchange of thought. The community becomes the speaking "I" of the Psalms:

> Au sens littéral, les psaumes se déroulent générelement dans une atmosphère infra-chrétienne. Ce mot veut signifier exactement un monde des rapports entre Dieu et l'homme .... Les deux grands personnages qui occupant l'avant-scène du psautier, ce sont Dieu et le psalmiste.[13]

Such readings of the Psalms argue towards an atemporal unity, a structural continuity between the "present" of the psalmist's initial response and the present of the modern reader/listener. The Psalms provide a structure for discourse, a paradigm which overcomes and

[11] C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), p. 64.
[12] Pius Drijvers, *The Psalms: Their Structure and Meaning* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), p. 2.
[13] F. Vanderbrouke, *Les Psaumes Le Christ et Nous* (Abbaye du Mont Cesar, Louvain: Centre Liturgique, 1965), p. 15.

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transcends historical decay, which allows for the necessary immediacy of discourse to become present.

Louis Marin, in developing Benveniste's distinction between narrative (histoire) and discourse (discours),[14] illuminates this evocation of the present.

> The spoken "I" is thus the most massive and the most redundant identity possible. But at the same time, it is also the most extreme difference possible. It is difference itself because the "act of saying" 'I' for the person who says it is an act that is repeated every time. Moment for moment, it brings about the insertion of the speaker into a new moment of time and into a different discursive and circumstantial texture. . . . Moreover, this conjunction of the same and of the different is *dialogical* . . . It is "you" that fills in the empty formal identity, that sets up the present difference of the "I" into an identity . . . .
>
> . . . in discourse's execution, there exists a permanent present, a "now"—"this present which is displaced with the progress of discourse all the while remaining present." It is an enunciative permanence that is the discourse itself. But simultaneously there exists a present instant "reinvented every time one speaks, a new moment, not yet lived" that is the accession of the discursive act where the punctual coincidence of event and speech act is marked. These present enunciative instants fragment the permanence of the enunciative "now," but also constitute it and produce it. And here a new contradiction develops within the contradiction itself, for this ego produced by speech has a present presence which is only implicitly present in its discourse. No signifier marks it in its own right.[15]

The written Psalms, when spoken, become ritualized opportunities for discourse, providing a way to order the human-divine relationship.

Stravinsky's use of psalm texts is specifically non-liturgical. Such a use of religious language is analogous to T. S. Eliot's in the *Four Quartets*: elements are selectively garnered, removed from their original (historical) function, still indicating it in their rich allusiveness. These selected phrases, images, and patterns are combined to create

[14] Louis Marin, "The Autobiographical Interruption: About Stendhal's *Life of Henry Brulard*," *MLN*, 93 (1978), 599-600.
[15] Ibid., p. 602.

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a new, yet already familiar, structure. (In Lévi-Strauss's terms, presented in *The Savage Mind*, Stravinsky, like Eliot, becomes a *bricoleur*.)[16]

The three psalms that Stravinsky chose—# 38, # 39, and # 150—are specifically concerned with discourse and with dialogic relationships. In his "Remarques" preceding the musical score for the *Symphony of Psalms*, Stravinsky commanded, "Les trois parties de cette symphonie se jouent sans interruption." When considered together, Psalms # 38, # 39, and # 150. become a discursive unit.

Psalm 38 Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears; for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. O spare me, that I may recover strength; before I go hence, and be no more.

Psalm 39 I waited patiently for the Lord: and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: and many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.

Psalm 150 Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise Him for His mighty acts: Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet: praise Him with the psaltery and the harp. Praise Him with the timbrel and dance: praise Him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise Him upon the loud cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 38 begs the attention of the Lord; the speaker's direct address demands the participation of the "Thou" in the dialogue. The "Thou," vehemently urged to respond, is presented as both removed and authoritative, as controlling the speaker's existence—"before I go hence, and be no more"—without a direct involvement.

[16] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 16-36.

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The speaker begs that the distancing gap—presented, in a sense, as original: "for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were"—which is weakening him and threatening to negate his existence, be filled with a dialogical response.

Psalm 39 shows the effects of the dialogical presence which has replaced the initial, threatening absence (or less radically, the withholding of discursive involvement). The urgency of Psalm 38 is rewritten as patience, indicating a non-temporal change of interpretive perspective. The "I" now implies the presence of a third participant, as the "Thou" of Psalm 38 has become the "He" of Psalm 39. The speaker's past, characterized in Psalm 38 as a trial of frustrated dialogue, is signified here metaphorically in figures of constraint and darkness. The speaker's existence has been reordered—"and set my feet upon a rock, established my goings"—with a clear foundation, a new sense of origin. This changed existence climaxes in the "new song" that "He" has given the speaker. The song is lyric, yet determined by God, *not* the speaker. The speaker realizes that its meaning is not only apparent, but universal: "and many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." The speaker, as he exhibits by proclaiming the gift of the "new song," becomes a vehicle for making God's vitalizing creativity available to those who perceive the "He" of Psalm 39 as "our God." In this way, the speaker in Psalm 39 has become a paradigm for the psalmist's function, which consists in presenting a form or a pattern of figures to make dialogue between man and God possible, not only on a personal mystical level, but in an inclusive communality.

In Psalm 150, the speaker, no longer naming itself even as "I," exhorts a communal address to God. Psalm 150 is an obvious bridge between verbal and musical modes of "communion." Framed between the direct "praise ye the Lord" at the begining and end are models for ordering this praise, variations on the possibilities of positive response. Arbitrary musical sounds and performances are assigned a specific intentionality, and thereby take on a more linguistic function. The language of this exhortation takes on a more musical function in its patterns of repetition and variation, of expansion and restatement. The object of praise—again, the communally perceived "Him"—becomes a sort of tonic referent as the most stable entity of this speech. "Praise Him" becomes that which defines rhythm and tonality, in the sense of giving purpose and unity to the psalm. "Praise Him" is sustained by elaborations, becoming increasingly resonant, until

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it achieves a sort of stasis, a richly emphatic, ritualized naming of the presence that unites "everything that has breath."

Psalm 150 is the climax of a discursive movement; its musicality confirms its non-narrative function. Benveniste reminds us that "narrative intention . . . constitutes one of the main functions of language: it leaves the marks of its specific temporality."[17] No such temporal traces distract the "ye" of Psalm 150. Louis Marin clarifies Benveniste's point: "narative writing brings about the *simulation of an absence*. It produces a semblance of silence: silence of the saying within the said."[18] Such a silence, experienced as debilitating by the speaker in Psalm 38, is reinforced by the narrative inclusion of "as all my fathers were." The silence, broken by the speaker's attentiveness and God's response (Psalm 39) gives way to a non-narrative (also here in the sense of lyric) "new song" whose interpretation is not anchored in reference to a temporal precedent. (Note that the verbs in Psalm 39 change from past to present perfect to future tense.) In Psalm 39, a communal interpretation—"many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord"—is established. In Psalm 150, a communal response is orchestrated, in which the possibility of a "permanent present" can become a verbal and musical reality for "everything that has breath."

As a modern artist, Stravinsky chose to view the past as a set of previous "presents," a source of structures for discourse, rather than as a narrative sequence limiting the position of the present (an attitude linking him to such moderns as Ezra Pound). Music, being specifically non-narrative, provides a special discursive opportunity for the community of its listeners and performers.

The aural/oral topic of this grouping of psalms, climaxing in the imagery and detail of possible musical representations of human communication, provides a rich basis for Stravinsky's efforts to realize what he believed was the end of music: communion. In *An Autobiography*, Stravinsky reflects on the relationship of music to man's perception of time, and argues towards the profound role of musical structure.

> Music is the sole domain in which man realizes the present. The phenomenon of music is given to us with the sole pur-

[17] Marin, 599.

[18] Ibid.

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> pose of establishing an order in things, including, and particularly, the coordination between *man* and *time*. To be put into practice, its indispensible and single requirement is construction. Construction once completed, this order has been attained, and there is nothing more to be said.[19]

Again, in commenting on his composition of *Persephone*, Stravinsky claims, "Music is given to us . . . to order the chaotic and the personal into something perfectly controlled, conscious, and capable of lasting vitality." [20]

In the act of establishing "an order in things," Stravinsky revived (or perhaps rather exhumed) the musical constructions of earlier presents. (He proclaimed his role as a twentieth century composer as innovative rather than revolutionary, the latter term for him implying disorder rather than a new order.) In his *Sonate pour Piano*, for example, he developed the pre-classical meaning of Sonata: "I used the term sonata in its original meaning—deriving from *sonare* . . . . In using the term, therefore, I did not regard myself as restricted by any pre-determined form." [21] Yet he is not uninterested in later developments of the form; his own perspective is consciously and arbitrarily removed.

> . . . though determined to retain full liberty in composing this work, I had, while engaged on it, a strong desire to examine more closely the sonatas of the classical masters in order to trace the direction and development of their thought in the solution of the problems presented by that form.[22]

This attitude, suggesting an anthropological perspective on the evolution of musical forms, is present in Stravinsky's choice of the symphony form for "constructing" the *Symphony of Psalms*. The symphony is not a form conventionally used for religious music; nor do symphonies, with remarkable exceptions such as Beethoven's Ninth, have choruses. Stravinsky's choice of the symphonic form places his *Symphony of Psalms* in the tradition of Bach's B Minor *Mass* and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, which, as Roman Vlad points out, were dramatizations of liturgical texts, "musical cathedrals,"

[19] Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, p. 84.
[20] Vlad, *Stravinsky*, p. 113.
[21] Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, pp. 180-181.
[22] Ibid., p. 181.

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"erected in dimensions... far too huge for even the most solemn divine service." [23]

> Their proper place is in the concert hall and not the church. If a musical composition is to meet the requirements of the liturgy, it must of necessity be inspired by an absolute and dogmatic faith; and in the light of this faith all the impulses of the spirit, all the upheavals and torments of the emotions must be calmed down, resolved and sublimated into the devout and serene contemplation of the divine mystery.[24]

The choice of a symphonic form for a psalm setting, then, can preclude the need for such sublimation.

I believe Roman Vlad too quickly concludes that "the term 'symphony' is used here... merely to indicate an 'ensemble' of musical strands, and does not imply any particular form in the classical sense of the word." [25] Eric White, in *Stravinsky: A Critical Survey*, is less negative but no more illuminating than Vlad:

> ...though the *Symphony of Psalms* is not constructed according to the usual rules of symphonic form, despite the fact that the last movement is labeled *Allegro symphonique*, it nevertheless has a special order and unity of its own.[26]

Stravinsky's "symphonic" construction in this work is not merely (or necessarily negatively) non-classical; it is more positively confluent with earlier uses of the term "symphonia," particularly by early Christian writers. In an illuminating article titled "Symphony: What Does It Mean?" A. C. Keys traces changes in the meaning of the term. The initial Greek usage was abstract and metaphoric, figuring concord, agreement, or harmony. The term acquired more concrete reference in Roman usage. Origen, a pupil of Clement of Alexandria (late second or third century A.D.), "declares with true evangelical fervor that better than any instrument is the 'singing of Christ's peoples'—and the word he uses is *symphonia*." [27] Confusion surrounded

[23] Vlad, *Stravinsky*, pp. 155-56.
[24] Ibid., p. 156.
[25] Ibid., p. 158.
[26] Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: A Critical Survey* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), pp. 138-39.
[27] A. C. Keys, "Symphony: What Does It Mean?," *The Musical Quarterly*, 58 (1972), 238.

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the term throughout the Middle Ages; it referred to certain intervals, instruments, and/or musical ideals, and frequently to combinations of all three. Then, "in 1597 appear the *Sacrae symphoniae* of Gabrieli, which call for both voices and instruments."[28] As late as the *Musicalia Lexicon* of 1732, there was still no universal meaning for this term; one definition in this lexicon defines *symphonia* as "anything that sounds together;" a later definition adds "the pleasing harmony of different sounds and melodies."[29]

By departing from the revered conventions of Mozart and Haydn, Stravinsky is not dismissing the "symphonic tradition." Rather, he seems to be presenting the listener with a challenge to rediscover aspects of *symphonia* that have not been developed by more recently conventionalized musical constructions. The early Christian connotations of *symphonia*—as a vehicle for the community's praising God with song—resonate through the harmonic and orchestral meanings developed through the twentieth century. In this sense, the term *Symphony* itself becomes newly resonant, and when illuminated by past interpretations, it becomes almost radically modern in the *Symphony of Psalms*.

Stravinsky, having been given "a free hand regarding form and specification" for the 1929 B.S.O. commission, rejected the nineteenth century symphony form, which he found "highly antipathetic."[30] Considering Stravinsky's typically modern dismissal of the previous epoch as decadent, this antipathy is not surprising. Eric White directs further attention to Stravinsky's goal of construction for the *Symphony of Psalms*:

> ...to create an organic whole without conforming to the various models adopted by custom, but still retaining the periodic order by which the symphony is distinguished from the suite.[31]

This organic whole is preserved in a construction embodying the discursive aspects of the Psalm texts, and the dialogue and religious applications of the term *symphonia*.

Using the Psalm texts as a basis for this symphony was a way of attempting a self-defining unity.

[28] Ibid., p. 240.
[29] Ibid., pp. 240-41.
[30] White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, p. 321.
[31] Ibid.

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In considering the problems inherent in the relationship of text to musical setting, Calvin Brown, in *Music and Literature*, suggests that the literary text can provide musical freedom:

> Literary suggestion has really not so much created new forms, in the strict sense of the word, as it has conferred a certain amount of freedom from what many composers were coming to regard as the tyranny of the old forms.
>
> . . . we can say that the great majority of literary works have no set forms, but have individual forms depending upon the exigencies of the poet's subject and materials. And the chief formal influence of literature on music has been the achievement of a similar freedom for the composer.[32]

More radically, Brown suggests that text and music are inseparable, bonded together from a work's inception, with the text as the work's beginning authority. The listener cannot perceive the text as separate from its musical setting:

> In one sense, all vocal music is programmatic, for the words carry with them ideas outside the music, and if there is to be any connection between text and music, the music must in some way be connected with the ideas expressed in the text. Vocal music, however, is usually excluded from discussions of program music for a very obvious reason: the text is a part of the music . . . .[33]

(In this context, Roman Vlad justifies Stravinsky's use of the term *symphony* as a textual grouping: "*Symphony of Psalms* meant a 'collection' of pieces on the texts taken from various Psalms." [34])

The music of the *Symphony of Psalms* does not "interpret" individual images, words, or phrases as religious music often does—e. g. descending bass lines are conventionally used to signify hell. Stravinsky had vehemently rejected the Romantic conventions of word/text setting, particularly Wagnerian *leitmotiv*, and especially

> the spirit of systematization which, under the guise of doing away with conventions, establishes a new set, quite as arbitrary and much more cumbersome than the old. So that it is less the

[32] Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1948), pp. 220-21.
[33] Ibid., p. 229.
[34] Vlad, *Stravinsky*, p. 137.

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> arbitrariness . . . that tries our patience, than the system which this arbitrariness sets up as a principle.[35]

Nineteenth century text setting had reduced the possibilities of the music, so that Stravinsky claimed:

> Song, more and more bound to words, has finally become a sort of filler, thereby evidencing its decadence. From the moment song assumes as its calling the expression of the meaning of discourse, it leaves the realm of music. . . .[36]

Assigning such a function to song is a reduction of the possibilities for communion which Stravinsky explores in the union of dialogical structures. His score does not "express the meaning of discourse"; rather, I suggest, it shares in the function of discourse. The score does not signify the text in a verbal/musical equivalence; rather, they co-exist in a present sense. The most obvious discursive aspects of the musical score are structures of repetition (echoes, inversions, re-occurrences, proximities, dynamic variations) and interplay (between choral sections, chorus and orchestra, orchestral sections, sound and silence, metrical figures, and tonalities). These become figures for the role of discourse, though not necessarily signifiers of the discursive content.

The special discursive qualities of the psalms become more apparent in the juxtaposition of a single voice line against densely textured choral passages, in the contrast of speech-like sections of almost monotonous melody—e. g. "exaudi orationem meam, Domine" in the beginning of Part I—with richly polyphonic passages, and in the framing of sections that tenuously have probed tonality with authoritative, harmonically simple chords. Temporality is made precarious in terms of musical time. A favorite device in the *Symphony of Psalms* in the resolution of rapid, metrically regular figures into suspended, stable notes held against a tolling bass figure. The most memorable example of this occurs in the E♭ section concluding Part III (at section 22), where an unresolved harmony, a simple constant rhythm, and an unvarying heartbeat tempo suspend the listener's expectation of a conventional drive towards a symphonic ending. Musical time here begins to work against temporality, achieving a

[35] Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, pp. 101-103.
[36] Ibid., p. 59.

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transfixed sort of suspension, undermining the reader's linear (I believe narrative) and conventional expectations of a recapitulation.

In *Dialogues and a Diary*, Robert Craft prompts Stravinsky to discuss the order of construction in the *Symphony of Psalms*.

> I began with Psalm 150, ... after finishing the fast tempo sections of the Psalms, I went back to compose the first and second movements.[37]
> ... Though I chose Psalm 150 first, and though my first musical idea was the already quoted rhythmic figure in that movement, I could not compose the beginning of it until I had written the second movement. Psalm 40 (39) is a prayer that a new canticle may be put into our mouths. The Allelujah is that canticle .... The rest of the slow tempo introduction, the 'Laudate Dominum,' was originally composed to the Slavonic words of the 'Gospodi Pomiluy' ... I decided to end the work with this music, too, as an apotheosis of the sort that had become a pattern in my music since the epithalamium at the end of *Les Noces*.[38]

Stravinsky's statements on this construction argue against a sonata-based dvelopment, a sequential order in developing the logic of the work. Two ideas are based in non-Latin structures: the Greek/Hebrew "Alleluia" (not included in the Vulgate for Psalm 150, but meaning "Praise the Lord"), and the composer's own vocabulary of available musical patterns. And the discursive essence of the composing process is affirmed: "The Allelujah and the slow music at the beginning of Psalm 150, which is an answer to the question in Psalm 40 (39), were written last." [39]

Perhaps the single most important musical pattern in the *Symphony of Psalms* is the use of interlinked thirds. Commenting on the first movement ("hear my prayer, O Lord"), Stravinsky presents a unifying process of inter-relationship:

> The sequences of two minor thirds joined by a major third, the root idea of the whole work, were derived from the trumpet-harp motive at the beginning of the *allegro* in Psalm 150.[40]

[37] Craft and Stravinsky, *Dialogues*, p. 44.
[38] Ibid., p. 46.
[39] Ibid., p. 44.
[40] Ibid., p. 45.

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(Eric White comments, "The use of this device helps to confirm the strong feeling of internal unity that pervades the whole work."[41])

Figures of dialogue also confirm this unity. In a simple sense, this concept is confirmed within the first forty bars of the work. The listener hears an exchange of orchestra and chorus, an interplay of altos and full chorus, an interplay of punctuating, definite E minor chords against ascending/descending figurations of interlinked thirds. At section 4 of Part I, the initial alto line is limited in its melodic scope, emphasizing its rhythmic function in its spareness. This speech-like line gives way to the amplification and expression of additional voices at section 5, adding timbre, color, and harmonic tension, culminating in a precariously supported G major chord. Dialogue establishes itself with the re-entry of the austere alto line at section 7: a repetition of the "melody" of adjacent pitches against a more complexly developed orchestra background.

The E minor chord re-occurs, set off by brief silence, before section 9 (a monotonous utterance *against* silence) and before section 10, where it develops into a melody of wider intervals that is harmonized with growing intensity until it climaxes at section 12, with "mei" at full volume, full orchestration, and relative harmonic stability—E minor, with a C that may be seen as prophetic. The "Remitte mihi" follows as an inversion of the initial E minor, repeated with heavy accents, more like speech than song. It is tightly controlled, expanded by adjacent pitches, until it cadences at "et amplius non ero," which, through its disruptive bass line, moves through F major and C to a simple, openly constructed G major chord, that is held "senza dim.," and echoed in the silence, "enchainez" until Part II begins.

In Part II, the initial statement of the choral fugue (sopranos, section 5) is a precarious line, varying from the wide intervals of E♭ to B♭ below and B♭ to G♭ above, to the half-steps of "expectavi." But it is stabilized by the instrumental fugue which had introduced it (and also has filled the gap of silence with a "dialogue" of instruments). The traditional symbolic possibilities of fugal intercourse are confirmed in the subsequent entrances of altos, tenors, and basses, and expanded in the higher entrance of "Et statuit super petram pedes meos" at section 10. After the break at the end of section 11 (the conclusion of the fugue with a tenor climax at "direxit gressus meos")

[41] White, *Stravinsky: A Critical Survey*, p. 135.

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section 12 sounds new, but contains the opening instrumental figure. The listener's memory of this opening is tested by the growing syncopation, stressing the listener's familiarty with time and resolution in the movement. At section 14, the statement of the "new song" is presented as "new," in that it is not a fugue, and the chord of "novum" is a new sound. Yet the structure of the melody is familiar, and the meter and syncopation are established already in the listener's perception. The ending of Part II is more "new" to this movement; the music is purified of fugal complications, and simplified (almost rarified) by the *subito piano* section of section 17, finishing in the unresolved fermata of the final chord, which contains both the E minor beginning Part I and the C major ending Part III.

Part III introduces the beautifully suspended "Alleluia" and establishes the final authority of the C major tonality. The C major chord is established at the first utterance of "Dominum" in section 1. (Note that it is constructed only of the tonic and the major third, and that it employs the self-generating and self-affirming interval of the octave.) The next three statements of "Dominum" employ C major tonality (as does the first "Ejus") as does the final, profoundly authoritative "Dominum" that concludes Part III.

The initial "Allcluia" answers the movement of the woodwinds and horns in measures 1 and 2; it is set off as separate from the subsequent "Laudate" area by its decrescendo into a short silence. The "Laudate" at section 1 begins the tolling, ponderous pattern of the octaved bass that effects the suspended sense of temporality in this movement. This tolling becomes a perceivable surface, against which the vocal lines struggle to stabilize. Sections 1 and 2 become a true (in the sense of originating) beginning for the rest of Part III, estabishing, as it were, a discursive framework.

The B♭ added to the "divine" C major chord at "Dominum" (measures 21-22) is sustained against the C. It is perceived as dissonant here, despite the fact that the key signature through sections 1 and 2 is E♭; it is the tie to the instrumental entrances in section 3, where it is a disruption to the C major key signature. The pattern of six reiterated eighth notes (occurring first in major thirds at measure 24) is a prolepsis of this figure as "Laudate Dominum" of section 8. Although the C major is reinforced at the beginning of section 3, the harmonic ascent developing here leaves its C major basis, and the reiterated eighth note pattern breaks into triplets that grow into an almost parodic

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amplification, culminating in a climax of total orchestration. C major returns at the szforzando introducing section 6, and is re-established in the sopranos' melody of "Laudate," which recalls the "exaudi" of Part I. And dialogue is re-established in the altos' response—controlled, "cantabile, marcato ma non forte." This dialogue crescendos expansively to the octave E, which seems to miniaturize itself into the staccato eighth notes of section 8, engaging the tenors in unison with the reiterative altos. (Remember that this eighth note pattern is the originating figure of the composition.)

Section 9 voices the tolling bass of section 1 by assigning the chorus an instrumentally shared function, which culminates in the contrasting, ascending eighth note figurations of sections 9, 10, and 11. This series of proliferating ascents, more additive than climactic in structure, ends in re-establishing the order generated by silence and filled by dialogue. The initial "Alleluia" re-occurs, with the F (orchestra) and E♭ (chorus) intercourse of section 1. Following this "Alleluia", a "new" section is heard, more rapid, more simple metrically, and heavily syncopated. The choral lines again are more speech-like than song-like, the harmonic structure first simplified, then diffused (illustrated by the harp's role at section 14).

Eric White proclaims the break before section 13 as an integral moment in the movement:

> The material is extended and developed, reaching a climax of great power and splendour—"Laudate eum in sono tubae"—which is broken short by a brief return to the slow tempo of the beginning of the movement. This is just long enough for the choir to repeat their whispered "Alleluia"; and then the fast barbaric tempo is resumed.
>
> This brief break in the centre of the movement is astonishingly successful. Although musically the passage is very slight, (only five bars long), its effect is to maintain unimpaired the feeling of humility set forth at the beginning of the movement, and never really forgotten, despite all the brassy excitements that have intervened. It gives the movement a real centre of gravity....[42]

At the last two measures of section 14, the C major tonality is re-established, achieving a repetition (a simple recognition of dialogue) of the orchestra's motif at section 3. The subversive half-step figure

[42] White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, p. 325.

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of the orchestral accompaniment grows into the ascending E major "Laudate Dominum" of section 16 and the descending B♭ "Laudate Dominum" of section 17. The initial orchestral figure motif at section 3 has become a figure for discourse; it is interspersed with voices, whose function is both rhythmic (i. e. self-referring in temporality) and orchestral (non-temporal in adding color and timbre). This device is enlarged beyond its original presentation in the forceful expansion of full orchestration through sections 18 and 19, and, again, culminates in the broad silence before its *subito piano* echo in the F major of section 19, which suggests an "Alleluia" about to occur. Instead, the tonality moves to D major, and sopranos and basses begin a new fugue of "laudate," naming and calling the instruments. It is essential to note here that these are neither interpreted programmatically nor signified by their obviously available orchestral namesakes. The unremittingly regular tolling octaves are re-established in the bass. At section 21, the texture becomes denser with the addition of altos and tenors; the gradual crescendo intensifies the texture towards a climax which, instead of resolving into silence, becomes a changed self: metrically unified lines of simultaneously heard notes.

At this point, the start of section 22, the ultimate symbolic communion of orchestra and chorus seems to have been achieved. The area which follows conveys a Wordsworthian suspension of "something evermore about to be"; here the sense of the present becomes inescapable in the simple, insistent repetition and in the unresolved tension in tonality. The "laudate" of section 24 attains a spoken quality, and starts a series of "Laudate" and "Laudet," so that the invocation to dialogue becomes almost a trance-inducing design. This quality is intensified by the repetition of the E♭-D-C-D figure at sections 26 and 27. The voices diminish to silence; the orchestra struggles to attest to a new stability in F major tonality, which cadences in the re-vitalizing "Alleluia," and a repetition of section 1's "Laudate." The ending restates the "Dominum" and restores the C major resonance of section 1, but with the added strength of octave C's by altos and basses. Part III, like Psalm 150, concludes with its beginning, and in its ending restates the simplicity which generated so many attempts towards variation.[43]

[43] Roman Vlad (*Stravinsky*, pp. 159-167) focuses on certain discursive aspects of the *Symphony of Psalms*—e. g. he attributes to it the function of prayer. Vlad soon moves to an impressionistic plane of interpretation, but even there considers

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Stravinsky did not explore the representational possibilities of individual words and images. Indeed, his setting of the Psalms frequently counters the listeners's expectations of the conventional linear progression that can link musical form to narrative forms.

In this way, Stravinsky's role in the *Symphony of Psalms* becomes a sort of paradigm for the modern psalmist. Eric White cites Ansermet's statement, in *Les Fondemonts de la Musique dans la Conscience humaine*, of the paradoxical role that Stravinsky's distance as a composer implies.

> The *Symphony of Psalms* expresses the religiosity of others—of the imaginary choir of which the actual singing choir is an *analogon*; but it must be agreed that the expression of this religiosity is itself absolutely authentic.[44]

The composer's position, at once central and extrinsic, is like that of the psalmist—creating a representative order in which dialogue operates, providing a personally lyric mode for communal expression, and framing an open space in which the present "Now" of discourse may be realized.

the role of dialogical gestures. I find that Vlad's "reading" of the *Symphony of Psalms* assigns relationships of significance that are not inherent in the Psalm texts or in Stravinsky's score. But it does draw attention to gestures and figures of inter-dependence and response.

[44] White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, p. 327.

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Book Reviews

Chaucer, Langland, and the Creative Imagination by David Aers. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980. Pp. xii + 236. $25.00.

The "creative imagination" of the title is dialectical in its perception of the gap between traditional ideologies on the one hand and new forms of consciousness and social being on the other. David Aers associates Langland and Chaucer in this study because each possessed such an imagination, which led him to an awareness of the problematic nature of traditionally-sanctioned views of reality.

The first three chapters deal with occasions in the B-text of *Piers Plowman* in which Langland acknowledges a tension between his own consciously-held ideological positions and the imaginative versions of social reality which he has imported into his poem. Chapter 1 argues that the poet-narrator and other spokespersons endorse a view of society as a static hierarchy of estates, but that this view is rendered problematic by representations within the poem of social fragmentation and self-interested social practice. Chapter 2 applies a similarly structured argument to Langland's treatment of the Church. Although Langland regards the Church as a centralized, hierarchical, and wholly authoritative institution, his imaginative engagement with contemporary ecclesiastical realities leads him to acknowledge its corruption by secularism and economic individualism. Aers notes that revealed contradictions between traditional ideologies and social practice could well have led to apocalyptic resolutions, and he devotes Chapter 3 to an examination of instances in which Langland ultimately rejects the "temptation" to adopt such systems with their promises of total clarification. He views Langland's resolution as private, anti-institutional, and anti-millenial, expressed through Conscience's final exit from Holy Church in quest of Piers and Grace—"a lonely and individualistic pursuit of grace outside the traditional institutions" (p. 79).

Framing Aers's four chapters on Chaucer is a discussion of the "reflexive" imagination—an imagination which "discloses the processes by which authority is constructed, its grounds in individual and social consciousness and practice" (p. 82). Unlike Langland, who was impelled into such critical thought only by the clash between his ideology and his imaginative rendering of social reality, the mature Chaucer seems to have been predisposed to such habits of mind by personal tendency and social context. In the course of Chapter 4, we are shown several instances in which characters either exhibit or refrain from reflexive thinking: the Wife of Bath (with her "de-sublimation" of authoritative texts), the Pardoner (who reminds us of the human perspective of those who create authoritative texts), and the Parson with his implicitly criticized failure of reflexivity. Chapter 5 returns to the argumentative line of the Langland chapters, revealing a contradiction between Criseyde's aspirations and the vulnerability of her social situation, and defending her conduct on that ground. Chapter 6

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continues in a complementary vein with certain of Chaucer's "critical and reflexive meditations on medieval marriage" (p. 151). The concluding chapter returns to the early theme of social hierarchy, arguing that the *Knight's Tale* actually undermines notions of benign social harmony and that Theseus's "Firste Moevere" speech represents a ruler's effort at sacralization of his own government.

This study is praiseworthy in its determination to move beyond superficial consideration of social "backgrounds" into the interplay of traditional ideology and social developments which challenge traditional formulations. In my view, its strengths derive from those sections in which its thesis is most fully illustrated, its weaknesses from those at the moments at which it is most taken for granted. By this standard, the Langland sections—while more brief—are more authoritative in their demonstration of the clash between his consciously-held beliefs and his imaginative engagement with social issues. A further aspect of these sections is their attempt to mobilize in the service of literary criticism such terms and concepts of social analysis as ideology, mediation, and dialectic. These concepts enrich this line of argument, though some further definitions and explanations would be desirable. "Ideology," for example, seems at times to refer in a neo-Marxist sense to the biased or illusory views promoted by a dominant social class, and at times to refer more neutrally (in a sense based on Kuhn's theory of paradigms) to all traditional systems of belief as they become subject to the strain of new social issues.

Chaucer's disinclination to put forward overtly ideological statements necessitates a shift in Aers's argumentative strategy, and his emphasis on Chaucer's "reflexive" imagination is a reasonable adjustment. Yet he might have done more to describe the social considerations which engendered this habit of mind. He suggests in several provocative asides that Chaucer's reflexivity was paralleled by contemporary trends in theology, that Criseyde's social situation duplicates that of fourteenth-century women of equivalent social class, and that the political world of the *Knight's Tale* exhibits significant "continuities" with Chaucer's own. These promising suggestions are not, however, developed into a full theory of Chaucer's imagination in its social setting. In consequence, his "reflexivity" often seems to differ little from those qualities of ironic awareness noticed by formally-oriented critics of the previous three decades. In a series of local arguments, Aers shows with considerable verve that Chaucer held humane views on such issues of twentieth-century interest as militarism and the position of women in society. Despite their interest and presumable congeniality to the twentieth-century reader, these arguments do not advance his overall social hypothesis as much as would a more systematic demonstration of the relations of Chaucer's art with fourteenth-century social existence.

Even with such criticisms taken into account, this remains an invigorating study. It worthily joins works by such British medieval scholars as Rodney Hinton, Gordon Leff, Derek Pearsall, and Elizabeth Salter, who have raised parallel questions in several interrelated disciplines in a similarly probing and undogmatic spirit.

Paul Strohm

Indiana University

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Tennyson and Clio: History in the Major Poems by Henry Kozicki. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xvii + 185. $12.50.

Tennyson and Tradition by Robert Pattison. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. 178. $14.00.

New studies of Tennyson perhaps inevitably begin with attempts to show that he was intelligent and well-informed, something more than a sensitive plant. This is not just because W. H. Auden once stupidly called him "the stupidest" English poet. The very structure of Tennyson's poetry—self-doubting, presenting "vacillating" states of mind, idyllic and elegiac—suggests a poet more concerned with heart than with head. But there cannot be much question that Tennyson followed the social, scientific, and theological controversies of his age closely and intelligently.

Whether such attention to the main intellectual currents of his age led Tennyson to develop a systematic philosophy is another matter. Defenses of his intellectual cogency run the risk of making him out to be too systematic, too philosophical. This is the major weakness of Henry Kozicki's discovery in Tennyson of an evolving "philosophy of history" on a nearly Hegelian scale. Of course Tenyson's muse is Clio: there is nothing controversial about the claim that "if any single interest appeared to dominate Tennyson's work and thought, it was his concern about the whence and whither of human affairs" (p. xii). What Kozicki very usefully shows is not that Tennyson developed a full-fledged "philosophy of history," but that his thinking about history, responsive to many of the intellectual currents of his day, was more complex, subtle, and profound than a mere unfocused curiosity about whence and whither.

Kozicki's decade approach at times seems mechanical and unconvincing, as when he claims that Tennyson's "philosophy of history... breaks apart in the seventies and even more so in the eighties as the three main ideas that once had composed it begin to fragment into independent units" (p. 164). This only begs the question of the extent to which these "three main ideas" (providence, historical process, heroism) formed "a unity of thought" during earlier decades. Kozicki shows that they more or less did hang together earlier, but not that they fall apart in the seventies and eighties. Tennyson grows more pessimistic; providence seems more remote; the historical process looks more muddled than ever; and heroism seems more infrequent than ever. But these are still main categories in Tennyson's thinking about history.

If Kozicki does not always acknowledge the confusions and lack of system in Tennyson's ideas, he is still full of insights, perceptive readings, and useful information about the contexts of Tennyson's social thought (the Cambridge Apostles, Broad Church theology, and so on). These contexts he explores as helpfully as anyone since John Killham (*Tennyson and the Princess*, 1958). And the demonstration that Tennyson had coherent although changing ideas about history is itself a valuable addition to our understanding of his complex greatness. Because Kozicki interprets Tennyson's conservative social ideas as ideas, having philosophical depth beyond mere emotional reactions to immediate events, the

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poet as social and historical thinker joins the poet as intellectual reconciler of science and theology.

Robert Pattison's fine study of Tennyson's classical sources is not so wide-ranging nor so risk-taking as Kozicki's, but it is also about history. By treating poetic tradition as a synecdoche for tradition (or history), he suggests that his hunt for sources and influences is also an analysis of tradition and innovation as Tennyson's central values. Whether poetic tradition can actually stand for tradition in general in Tennyson is questionable. But Pattison is very good at showing how the poet adapts classical forms—idyll, epic, elegy, epithalamium—to his own uses, thus viewing him as an innovative traditionalist or, perhaps, as a romantic classicist.

Pattison almost does for Tennyson and the idyll what Robert Langbaum did for Browning and the dramatic monologue, except that the Tennyson who emerges is not unfamiliar. After Christopher Ricks, Dwight Culler, James Kincaid, and the other recent critics mentioned in Pattison's acknowledgments, no one will find this portrait of Tennyson "as a craftsman consciously working within a long and complex tradition of poetic forms" (p. 1) at all moot. J. M. Gray, Douglas Bush, and others have already covered much of the ground of Tennyson's classical sources. And there is something forced about Pattison's framing of his argument: he returns through G. K. Chesterton all the way to John Churton Collins to find critics to do battle with. But Pattison's first chapter is his weakest. Once he delves into the "long and complex tradition" of Theocritean idyll, Homeric epic, and the rest, he produces numerous useful judgments, based on solid scholarship, about how the poet worked and grew, and about how the tension of tradition and innovation yielded the organic unity that is often not visible on the surface of the poetry.

Pattison may err on the side of making the poet out to be too conscious and systematic in his classicism, just as Kozicki errs by making him out to be too systematically philosophical. Between the bleeding heart melancholic and the intellectual systematizer most recent critics have preferred the latter. But perhaps all efforts to rescue Tennyson from Auden's accusation and its variants are welcome and useful, as are these.

Patrick Brantlinger

Indiana University

Gérard de Nerval: The Mystic's Dilemma by Bettina L. Knapp. University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 198. Pp. viii +372. $21.50.

Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) is the first French writer to have used his dreams as primary subject matter in his writings. His images attain an archetypal and universal significance. Attracted to the occult, he introduced alchemical images and objects into many of his works.

Bettina Knapp explains that her study attempts "to evaluate Nerval's dreams along philosophical, aesthetic, and psychological lines." Nerval's dream motifs express his interest in a vast range of mystical topics and religious sects. The

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critic describes the latter in the course of the book, enabling the reader to draw parallels between Nerval's approach and ours to questions of sin, guilt, redemption, and death. Having lost his mother at an early age, Nerval idealized all women, but suffered when his picture proved untrue. As a way of release, he resorted to figures such as Isis and the Virgin Mary, withdrew from life into his dream realm, losing touch with reality and ending his life in suicide.

Knapp interprets Nerval's growing insanity, stressing his interest in the occult and dreams, discussing their impact upon his literary productions. The first of the book's three parts ("The First Darkness") deals with the young writer's attraction to the dead and to Germany, the country in which his mother was buried: at nineteen he translated *Faust* I. Under the influence of a great-uncle, he became interested in mythology and the occult, responding later to his friend Charles Nodier's encouragement to explore the unknown. In 1834 he met his life's passion, the singer Jenny Colon, who, as an *anima* figure, joined his former Platonic loves, but also became for him the Divine Mother and Wife: he was sure that if she did not love him in this life, she would in another one. He associated her with the Queen of Sheba and wrote for her the libretto of an opera of this title. After her marriage in 1838, he wrote her eighteen letters (probably never sent) in which he developed the themes of sacrifice, of mother and child, and of the son-lover. His love for her, after she died in 1842, took on the proportions of a myth. Not surprisingly, he wrote, with Alexandre Dumas, a drama called *The Alchemist*. In 1840, he started to translate *Faust* II, which confirmed his belief in reincarnation. The next year, he was committed to a mental hospital for the first time. From then on, he constantly mixed fantasy (or dream) with reality, experiencing repeated episodes of insanity.

The second part of Knapp's study deals with Nerval's travels in the Middle East, from which he brought back his strange *Voyage in the Orient*, an odyssey of his soul and of his initiation into the mysteries of death. Fascinated with the dream visions of Francesco Colonna, with the legends of Caliph Hakim and of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, he made them into archetypes. The third section of the book examines Nerval's *Daughters of Fire*, which consists of six tales, about six heroines, all fire spirits. For him, fire was associated with solar symbolism, the sun synonymous with creative energy, a guide to man in his daily ventures. On the whole, this is an interesting study of the hermetic sources and symbols of a sometimes radically esoteric writer.

FERNANDE BASSAN

Wayne State University

Henry James: The Later Novels by Nicola Bradbury, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979. Pp. 228. $32.00.

Not since Ruth Yeazell's *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* has anyone given the close attention to verbal structures in James's fiction that is manifest on every page of Nicola Bradbury's study. Without overly insisting on the sanctions in precedent and theory for her

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critical procedure, she takes her cues from William James's insights into the expressive connections between linguistic units and states of consciousness, from de Saussure's definition of language as a "system of differences" that grounds meaning on differentiations of verbal forms, and from Seymour Chatman's analysis of grammatical and syntactical forms in James's late style. Intensive, at times microscopic, attention to such linguistic and stylistic matters enables her to define subtleties in motive and attitude among characters, but also to heighten the significance of non-verbal forms and to discover, in a reader's response to the process of "representation"—to the acts of expression and communication that constitute full "representation"—the central concern that links reader, author, and protagonists in James's novels.

"The" reader is decidedly the alert reader for whom James wrote, described here as at times puzzled or partial in his understanding but elevated finally, as in most "reader-response" criticism, to the hypothetical status of "the most alert reader" imaginable, who proves to be completely in tune with the author's design, though protagonists are slow to attain, or incapable of attaining, that status, and though earlier, even "attentive critics," have failed to qualify.

Bradbury's first chapter is devoted to the representational functions of silence as she can demonstrate them to be in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the novellas *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awakward Age*, and *The Sacred Fount*: the unspoken dialogue of exchanged glances, tacit elisions, the "hush" of approaching death, or the "narrative silence" created by the evasion of crucial episodes and the resort instead to indirection. Silence, whether helpless in the face of the inexpressible, or deliberate in the face of the unspeakable, is a representational resource for James because it operates at the "interstices of formal expression" and, "reaching toward moral and even metaphysical significance" as a symbol of isolation, it is flexible, "unquantifiable" in its "form, or lack of form." It can reveal the machinations of "conspirators" and "manipulators" in certain roles and contexts, or the integrity of moral paradigms in others. The chapter is lucid in establishing its distinctions but too cursory in its coverage to provide convincing readings of the works it takes up.

To provide such readings becomes the aim of separate chapters on the three novels of the "major phase," and Bradbury's approach is adjusted significantly for each. Her approach to *The Ambassadors* responds to the predominance of visual and painterly imagery in the work. She applies Rudolph Arnheim's analysis of visual perspective as terminating in a "vanishing point" that is suggested rather than actually drawn, and that projects therefore an "infinity" beyond the converging lines that graph it. Correspondingly she finds that Strether gradually is brought to a compeletness of vision that writer and reader have earlier attained, a "still point" (defined by T. S. Eliot's high Anglican *Four Quartets*) that lifts Strether, for all his limitations, into the "freedom of absolute morality"; the "vanishing point" becomes the "absolute" realm of "right and wrong."

Bradbury's meticulous examination of linguistic patterns, the particularities of language, in the chapter on *The Ambassadors*, is the strongest feature of her book, but it becomes increasingly apparent that other considerations, imported and imposed or less intensively examined, are governing her analysis,

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leading her to ignore the charged clichés and the usages of social decorum in Strether's speech (Chad would be a "brute," and "guilty of the last infamy") when transporting Strether to the realm of "absolute" moral vision.

In *The Wings of the Dove*, Bradbury finds "no guiding rule of technique dominating every expressive element," a shifting stance or a "disjunctive tendency" in place of "central perspective." Accordingly she grounds her analysis on the attempt of characters to read their own story and, helpless to alter their fate, attain an "understanding" or "awareness" that becomes, in the case of the heroine, an "objective appreciation" that is "on a level with the author and reader," an "understanding inseparable from the author's own." Verbal analysis implements this forced severance of Milly from her world without convincingly justifying it. After first stripping Milly of any archetypal or national significance that has been claimed for her by other critics or by characters in the novel, so as to insist on her personal and human presence and her movement in the social world of Kate and Densher, Bradbury views Milly in her ethereal "transcendence" as "unscathed" by her usage at the hands of others, free of the world's "constraints." Verbal analysis, however, is not sufficient to distinguish characters' "manipulative categorization of other people" from James's own. Bradbury's reaching for parallels (often based on echo and "half-echo") to *Vanity Fair* and *Othello*, her clear cut differentiation of protagonists from villainous "conspirators" and other characters, and her emphasis (following John Bayley and A. C. Bradley) on characters themselves at the expense of dramatic action, are no substitute for the concern with the book's dramaturgy that the work demands.

The culmination of Bradbury's study is the chapter on *The Golden Bowl*. (A "Conclusion" largely reiterates claims already fully presented, and the penultimate chapter on the "Last Works" takes up the later fiction and nonfiction swiftly in an effort to declare that they will not sustain the interest of the three great novels.) Here she acknowledges explicitly what has been implicit in her analysis all along: that the novel's language must be considered in its interaction with "actions" and "characters," or with the larger contours of "scene-sequences." Although Bradbury's focus is thus widened as it must be, her rhetoric is channeled narrowly into the effort to exonerate Maggie from charges brought against her by her harshest critics ("We suspend narrow condemnation in the interests of a larger propriety") and to smooth out the moral complexities of the action and of James's responsibilities in writing it. The verbal analysis is at times finicky (there are virtually ludicrous claims made for the repetition of "for" in one sequence), and a firm though vaguely defined decorum is invoked as a standard against which to measure stylistic features which become conspicuous and suspiciously expressive in James: the "stylistic exuberance," the "excess" of melodrama, verbal statement, and imagery in the fiction. Some such features, Bradbury has explained earlier, elicit "the" reader's sympathic engagement with the characters, while others provoke a more detached "intellectual, rather than imaginative, attention." In either case Bradbury responds to them in such a way that they indicate corrosions, distintegrations, or incompletions, blindness or groping apprehension, on the part of fictive characters, while indicating at the same time that James's control is "flawless," that he and his narration are not implicated in the characters' fantasies or maneuvers. Only

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in *The Golden Bowl* does he acknowledge that some "excesses" of imagery, easily excused by Bradbury, are also his own.

The issue that proves to be central to her reading of James is the issue of his authority, the complications of which she suggests at points despite her overemphasis on James's and the readers' relation to protagonists or "centers of consciousness" among the fictive characters. Recognizing at the end that six characters in *The Wings of the Dove* are, "to some extent, authorial figures," she can only conclude: "how different are their authority and reliability, and how little relation this bears to their worldy position!" James grounded his authority on analogies to painting and drama which Bradbury recognizes but does not examine, and, as *The Golden Bowl*'s Preface makes clear, on a complicitous involvement with his characters that eludes the moral perspective which enables Bradbury so easily to distinguish "conspirators" from protagonists, or the "materialism" of a character in one novel from the purchasing power of a millionaire in another. The "exploiting" and "manipulating" that she remarks in James's use of his materials bear no relation in her view to the exploitation and manipulation that she condemns in the behavior of his characters. James's exercise of authority entailed hazards, moral risks, of a kind that Bradbury is eager to recognize in some of his protagonists but would deny to James himself. The "ideal" in *The Golden Bowl*, she declares, "approximates" Keats's "'Negative Capability,'" the capacity of "'being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.'" This is an enabling imaginative power that Bradbury rightly relates to the novelist's "power to guess the unseen from the seen," as James claimed in "The Art of Fiction," the "uncertainty" of the "'guess'" that Bradbury asks us to recognize in James's best fiction. Yet when she finds Strether the exemplar of negative capability she lifts him into a realm of "absolute right and wrong" and finds "no uncertainty" in his final words. James's guesses finally, and those of an alert reader, have no irresolution in her view; the hazard of guessing dissolves in righteous certitude.

Indeed the term "category" in Bradbury's critical vocabulary defines the conventional moral perspective that circumscribes her responses to the verbal textures and movement of James's novels, and her use of it suggests problems in critical methodology that critics have not resolved and this study dramatizes by throwing into relief. Bradbury exposes as reprehensible the "manipulative categorization of other people" (including the "myth-making process"), or "the tendency to categorize experience" in Kate's and Susan Stringham's imaginations in *The Wings of the Dove*, and, while she exonerates the protagonist Milly from the charge, she presents no ground for dissociating James from the same activity. Indeed "preserving moral categories of judgment" is crucial for Bradbury, and the "miscarrying of the various plots of *The Wings of the Dove*, and of the good intentions of all the characters in the first volume of *The Golden Bowl*" is attributed to "inadequate categorization of experience." The hazardous experience of reading James eludes the categories that Bradbury applies with so firm a hand to the sensuous surface and the deeper rhythms of James's fiction.

Laurence B. Holland

The Johns Hopkins University

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Literary Impressionism, James and Chekhov by H. Peter Stowell. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980. Pp. ix + 277. $17.00.

What is literary impressionism? That is one of the most vexing questions on the critical scene today. H. Peter Stowell is aware of the many dilemmas which plague the field his book addresses. As he notes, "Impressionism has always been a difficult concept to pin down"; even worse, "there is little agreement about who is and is not an impressionist." The reason for this confusion is that impressionism is not one thing but many. It includes, for example, Ford Madox Ford's doctrine of novelistic technique, a tradition of unreliable narration in fiction, a movement in French painting, a concern with perception in philosophy and literature from Hume to Pater and Conrad, and a period of transition in the history of the novel from realism to modernism. The list could go on and on. No single essence underlies the diverse group of elements which make up impressionism. Instead, impressionism is inherently pluralistic—a "family," in Wittgenstein's sense, like the group "games" which has no uniform set of features shared by all its members, from chess to football. A "family" consists of a series of resemblances and differences, convergences and divergences. The challenge for students of impressionism, then, is to clarify and organize the relations among its members without overlooking its multiplicity.

Stowell seems to accept this challenge in his very choice of James and Chekhov as his central figures. After acknowledging that the differences between these two writers might seem more striking than their similarities, Stowell suggests that "both their disparities and their affinities reinforce the argument that literary impressionism was a widely cast and loosely held net that bound together the most unlikely writers, all the while allowing them to swim freely." James and Chekhov are related, in Stowell's view, because both respond in their works to what Henry Adams calls the "supersensual multiverse." This is a fluid, pluralistic world where change prevails over stability, where there are many "truths" which refuse unification into the "Truth," and where the meaning of "reality" is open to infinite variation as perceiver and perceived shift in relation to each other. By focusing their dramatic attention on the workings of consciousness, these two writers (and their kindred literary impressionists) "discovered modernism." Among their many differences, however, James tends to depict characters who struggle relentlessly to master and order the flux; Chekhov may lift his characters into a privileged moment of synthetic perception, but then he plunges them all the more deeply into the tedium of disconnected drifting from moment to moment. By mapping convergences and divergences in this way, Stowell takes an important step toward understanding impressionism.

Elsewhere, though, Stowell lapses into monism. He often refers to "impressionism" as if it were a single entity. His long and interesting chapter on the distinguishing features of impressionism contains many statements of the sort: "impressionism is this" and "literary impressionists do that." One frequently wonders whom he has in mind, since many of his claims fit some members of the family but not others. At one point, adopting Joseph Frank's controversial argument about spatial form in modern literature, Stowell asserts unequivocally that "Literary impressionists, working in their temporal art, strove to spatialize time." But this does not hold for the complex temporal structure of *The Good*

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Soldier. By dramatizing Dowell's rambling efforts to make sense of his past, Ford emphasizes that we live forward but understand backward—and that no spatial haven of synchronic comprehension can rescue us from the diachronic vagaries of anticipation and retrospection. Nor does Stowell's assertion explain why Conrad disrupts the time-line of the story in *Lord Jim*. Conrad's bewildering, fragmented narrative aims to upset the complacent confidence of his readers in cultural constructs and moral values which are not eternal verities but only historical fictions and hence radically contingent. Ford and Conrad, in their different ways, seek not to overcome time but to prompt their readers to reflect about the inescapable temporality of understanding and existence. Stowell is right that many literary impressionists explore the nature of time by experimenting with traditional conventions of narrative order. But "spatial time" is not an essential feature of literary impressionism, a value shared equally by all of the writers who swim in its wide, loose net.

When he describes the multiplicity of impressionism, Stowell argues that it is "not a movement, but a far-reaching cultural phenomenon" which encompasses not only literature and painting but also philosophy. Because it heralds the modern preoccupation with the status of meaning and the limits to perception, Stowell suggests that impressionism anticipates phenomenology. There are two advantages to establishing this relationship between art and philosophy. It not only advances our understanding of cultural history by charting the emergence of modernism across disciplinary boundaries; it also makes available to the critic a useful conceptual framework for analyzing the impressionists' explorations of the vicissitudes of consciousness. Stowell's book exploits these advantages with mixed success. His study draws on only a very limited range of phenomenological concepts, and it is sometimes imprecise in its use of them. Stowell claims, for example, that "The impressionist attempts to capture the feel, texture, and consciousness of the phenomenological *tabula rasa* or, in the impressionist lexicon, 'the innocence of the eye.'" But it is misleading to attribute to phenomenology (and to all impressionists) an epistemology which believes that the mind can make itself a blank slate. Stowell seems to refer here to Husserl's procedure of "bracketing"—the "reduction" which suspends the "natural attitude" of unquestioned engagement with the world in order to describe the structures of consciousness and experience which go unnoticed because we take them for granted in everyday life. The "reduction" is the work not of an "innocent" mind, however, but of a trained philosopher with sophisticated assumptions and procedures. Furthermore, "bracketing" reveals that consciousness is intentionally active rather than blankly receptive. From Husserl through Heidegger to Gadamer and Ricoeur, phenomenologists argue that knowing cannot be innocent of presuppositions; in their view, understanding is always directed by the assumptions and interests of the observer, always guided by his expectations, molded by his temperament, and limited by his situation.

Stowell quotes Merleau-Ponty frequently, and the passages he cites are often illuminating. Except for an occasional offhand reference to Sartre, however, he makes no mention of the other leading figures in the phenomenological tradition. Like impressionism, phenomenology is a diverse family. Although Stowell uses the term as if it referred to a single set of precepts, its net is wide enough to include

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Husserl's early idealism and his later turn to the realism of the lived world, Heidegger's quest for Being and Sartre's existential Marxism, Poulet's criticism of consciousness and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the symbol. The diversity which marks the community of phenomenological thinkers might even provide a helpful guide for mapping the multiplicity of impressionism. Henry James seems to share Husserl's interest in how consciousness persistently composes the world by projecting itself beyond the side of an object presented to it. Ford anticipates Merleau-Ponty's fascination with the ambiguities and obscurities of unreflective experience. With Heidegger and Sartre, Conrad exposes the nothingness at the foundation of existence. Stowell also misses the opportunity to take advantage of phenomenology's research on aesthetics. Although he explores the role of indeterminacy in impressionist fiction, he ignores Roman Ingarden's theory of how literary works represent objects through a stratum of aspects made up of gaps and blanks. Stowell discusses the reader's "role as co-maker" and "active participant" in constructing a work, but his bibliography is silent about Wolfgang Iser's seminal studies of the reading process.

Stowell divides Chekhov's and James's growth as writers into three stages: "The Emerging Impressionist," "Hesitation and Achievement," and "The Impressionist." After an initial period of discovery and exploration, each writer makes some progress but also digresses or falls short before attaining his ultimate vision. Stowell's own book belongs in his middle stage. Both in what it accomplishes and in what it fails to do, his book points in directions where answers may eventually be found to the questions which surround impressionism.

PAUL B. ARMSTRONG

University of Virginia

Conrad in the Nineteenth Century by Ian Watt. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979. Pp. xvii + 375. $21.50.

Ignoring the deconstructive fibrillations of Derrida, the archeological pyrotechnic displays of Foucault, and all similar innovations, Ian Watt gives us a plain, unvarnished Conrad. The elusive Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* originates with the agent Klein whom Conrad saw dying on the Congo steamer *Roi des Belges*. Yet, there is an overlay of Arthur Eugene Constant Hodister, a reformer who was director of the *Syndicat Commercial du Katanga* for a time. Yet, again, Kurtz differs from both Klein and Hodister while showing similiarities to numerous other celebrities: Emin Pasha (born Eduard Schnitzer 1840-92), Major Musgrave Barttelot, and Charles Henry Stokes (141-45). Watt follows his method thoroughly and judiciously. He tries to find the origin of Conrad's fiction in his experience, carefully sifting other scholars' scattered evidence. Within the limits of Watt's plan, his work will stand as one of the most important studies of Conrad. Watt's unswerving adherence to his method is both the strength and the weakness of his work.

Beginning with a sketch of Conrad's earlier life (1857-94), Watt defines several

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ways in which Conrad was a man divided, *homo duplex*. The outlines of this period are well-known: Conrad's family's sufferings as a result of his father's opposition to the Czarist rule of Poland, his Uncle Bobrowski's constant scolding about the boy's irresponsible ways, his apparently self-inflicted wound in Marseilles. In these experiences Watt locates the major themes of Conrad's fiction: his pessimistic perspective, his distrust of bourgeois values, his concern to transcend Byronic indivdualism to reach a larger loyalty, his interest in doomed resistance, heroic defeat, and fidelity. These themes set Conrad apart from other English novelists of his time and are rooted in his personal experience as well as in the literature of his native Poland. Conrad is torn by emotional and intellectual contradiction. His painfully created fiction is his attempt to resolve these anxieties. Watt believes that in the face of all forces which dwarf individual human effort, Conrad clings to the moral imperative of "solidarity" or commitment. As Conrad himself noted, his theme is fidelity. Watt devotes a chapter each to explication of four works written in the 19th century (*Almayer's Folly*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*). When the curious reader turns to the series of Concordances and Verbal Indexes to these works by Conrad, it is a bit surprising to see that the word *solidarity* does not occur at all in *Almayer's Folly*, nor *Heart of Darkness*, and the single occurrence in *Lord Jim* does not refer to human relationships. The theme unifying these four works is undenominated in the texts.

Intuitively, most readers feel that there is a process of development evident in these four works. Clearly the shapeliness and economy of *Heart of Darkness* is of superior quality to the interesting but slack first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. Watt's explanation of this development is not completely satisfying. Almayer himself, of course, originates in the Dutch trader Olmeijer and the topography of Conrad's Sambir reflects actual settlements astride the Berau river. The fiction transforms these experiences to conform to "current market formulae" (43), which are contradicted by a drive toward the very serious French models of Flaubert and Maupassant, so that "Almayer is a Borneo Bovary" (51). These aims are incompatible, for the reader luxuriates in the romantic fantasies of Nina, while ridiculing her father's inability to escape from his dreams. Watt sees this problem as primarily commercial. Conrad was trying to reach a much larger audience than Flaubert and so he created "the more serious issues" (55) embedded in a cocoon of moonshine. He also notes that Conrad's English is a bit awkward in his first novel in its sentence structure, repetition, and over-qualification; and he observes that Conrad's prose becomes more fluent with each succeeding book. Finally, he sees Conrad as using the ironical stance of Flaubert to evade confronting the problems in the character of Almayer which were painful for the author personally.

In *The Nigger of the Narcissus* Watt sees a sharpening of thematic focus, which can be clarified by ideas stated by Emile Durkheim's *De la division du travail social*, even though it is unlikely that Conrad had read this work. Durkheim argues that the division of labor in modern society creates an organic unity. In order for such a group to function, it must have a concensus of values and attitudes. Watt sees *The Nigger of the Narcissus* as the examination of organic unity, the ship's crew, under such extreme stress that its solidarity

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crumbles into a state of *anomie*, to use Durkheim's vocabulary. The figure of old Singleton, after thirty hours, still steering at the wheel of the ship is Conrad's affirmation of "The ultimate and universal basis of human solidarity" (125). The diachronic movement Watt is tracing in Conrad's works appears to be a process of clarifying the author's ideology. *Almayer's Folly* involves *issues* which are clarified to some degree in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and which will become even clearer in the masterpieces *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*. While readers may agree that *Heart of Darkness* crackles with a power, found only faintly pulsing in the earlier works, it is not so obvious that *Heart of Darkness* compels because of its ideological sharpness. Is *Heart of Darkness* remarkable because it is Conrad's "ideological summa" (148)?

When Watt turns to *Heart of Darkness* his study repeatedly turns up matters of biographical and historical fact which significantly color our understanding of the text: when Conrad began to write for *Blackwoods*, he acquired a new sense of audience; in the current myth of "going native," Conrad might see the process of his own denationalization; in the vision of the Imperial mission in popular writers like Kipling and Rider Haggard, the virtues of duty, military discipline, and technological efficiency provide the assumptions scrutinized in Conrad's story. Watt is less satisfactory in dealing with the problem of normative judgment in the work. If this text sums up Conrad's worthwhile thinking on historical and social problems, why is it finally so opaque, so inconclusive? The argument that "inconsistencies in Conrad's attitudes to colonial and racial problems must in general be understood in their historical context" (160) does not explain why modern readers should find an "inconsistent" ideological position gratifying. Watt's judgment that "*Heart of Darkness*... endure(s) as the most powerful indictment of imperialism" (161), is not self-evidently true. Marlow, in the final scene, does lie to the Intended bride of Kurtz, so concealing the true horror of the European presence in Africa. Conrad, too, does not publish his diary of horrible observed facts in the Congo, but softens these facts into fictional ambiguities for public consumption. To account for the improvement of *Heart of Darkness* over *Almayer's Folly*, we must acknowledge that *Heart of Darkness* is systematically obscure, and that growing obscurity does not fit easily into the theory that Conrad's works are best when most ideologically incisive.

Watt explains the artful ambiguity of *Heart of Darkness* as the consequence of Impressionism and Symbolism. Literary impressionism has been the subject of lively discussion for at least the last decade. Watt refers to the "Preliminary Papers" distributed for seminar #8 at the 1975 annual convention of the Modern Language Association. In fact, there have been five seminars in the last six years discussing this topic, as well as recent books on impressionism in Stephen Crane, Henry James, and Chekov. Watt's judgment that "it is very unlikely that Conrad either thought of himself as an impressionist or was significantly influenced by the impressionist movement" (179) is, at best, only partially correct. Watt's study plays down the impact of Ford on Conrad and does not see the full implication of Conrad's move toward an ambiguously structured text, demanding a highly constructive role of the reader. Watt's consideration of the phenomenology of art is deficient. He treats language under the realist assumption

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that it refers to an external subject, such as the Belgian occupation of the Congo. He also considers the possibility that language is expressive of certain mental states and anxieties in the author's or in a character's mind. But he rarely looks at a text as an experience. This is a serious shortcoming in any critical survey of a piece of literature, but it is especially crippling if the author in question is apparently a pioneer in exploring the use of language as a model of perception and as a means to manipulate the reader's process of reading or his encounter with the artifact of the text.

Given Watt's method of analysis, his examination of the biography of the author and his definition of how the text refers to historical situations, it is natural that he should conclude, "What makes reading *Heart of Darkness* so unforgettable is surely the harrowing power with which Conrad convinces us of the essential reality of everything that Marlow sees and feels" (252). Working on the theory that stridency of assertion always rises when the speaker's doubt in his position increases, we are suspicious of the words "is surely." How is "essential reality" different from just plain "reality"? We can certainly imagine the opposite assertion, that the reader is captivated by Conrad's work because he is constantly reminded that it is a fiction, a tale told by Marlow on the *Nellie*, twice-told by the outside "I" narrator to us. If we want to get near "reality," why not read Conrad's Congo diary? Take the entry of 3 July, "Met an off(icer) of the State inspecting. A few minutes afterwards saw at a camp(ing) place the dead body of a Backongo. Shot? Horrid smell." These lines are a good bit nearer the historical reality than the inconclusive fiction of Marlow, yet they lack the power of the verbal artifice, the conventions of fiction which Conrad constantly manipulates precisely to remind his audience that they are reading a story.

Consider Watt's anthropomorphic assumption in sentences like these: Lord Jim "may even have identified with Brown to the extent that *he thought that*, like himself, Brown ought to be given another chance" (342, italics added). It is not unusual for Watt to vivify characters when he summarizes stories, constructing what these characters must have been thinking, what their motives must have been, imputing a life to them independent of the words of the text, like studying what Hamlet's curriculum at the University of Wittenberg must have been before the play began. So long as the reader knows that he is participating in an activity, generated in him by the manipulation of conventions in the story, and knows that literary characters do not really have thoughts and motives beyond those stated by the text, such constructions are quite properly part of the experience of the artifact. But as an explanation of the artistic power of the work, Watt is on much sounder ground when he acknowledges that Conrad had a theory for manipulating an effect in his reader and that he marshalled the techniques of delayed encoding, symbolic deciphering, and anachronic oscillation to that end.

But if we grant that "there is little question that Conrad conceived his fiction in terms of a planned sequence of effects on the reader" (306), how does his practice square with the aims of the naive moralist? Is Conrad's work powerful because he discovered gradually that in this hostile world man must maintain his solidarity, his fidelity, to what appear to be shortsighted goals of

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conduct (as Watt seems to argue on p. 125) or is it powerful because the artful author contrives verbal effects which let his reader glimpse only partially, and hidden in a mist of anachronic oscillation and unreliable narration, his kernel of truth? Watt wants Conrad to give us maxims to live by, like *Tom Brown's School Days*. But what the critic of Conrad must explain is why we continue to read his work when it is most cunningly contrived to make the extraction of such maxims from the text virtually impossible.

TODD K. BENDER

University of Wisconsin

Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist by Frederic Jameson. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980. Pp. 190. $11.95.

Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis by Timothy Materer. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979. Pp. 231. $12.50.

"I do not think I had ever seen a nastier-looking man," Ernest Hemingway once said of Wyndham Lewis. "Under the black hat, when I had first seen them, the eyes had been those of an unsuccessful rapist." Lewis's self portrait, leering from the cover of Frederic Jameson's new book, confirms that impression—as do the violence, mysogyny, and fascist rhetoric in much of his writing. He was a mean customer, and partly for that reason he is the least read of the so-called classic moderns. Critical studies like Jameson's (or Hugh Kenner's earlier work, *Wyndham Lewis*) are quite rare. Lewis is one of those leopards who has not yet become part of the ritual in the academic temple, and when he is pulled out of his relative obscurity he can be made to seem as sensational and radical as modernism itself once was.

Jameson makes a point like this in the introduction to his book, which of the two volumes under review is easily the more complex, demanding the closer description. It is a small book with a remarkable theoretical ambition, trying not only to reclaim Lewis as an object of attention, but to resolve a couple of the oldest problems in Marxist criticism. First is the longstanding debate over modern art, represented on one side by the followers of Georg Lukács, who see modernism as a decadent, escapist retreat from social realism, on the other by the followers of the Russian Formalists and the *Tel Quel* group, who see it as a complex, often contradictory type of revolutionary *praxis*. Second is the debate over Freudian interpretation, which seems to be a "materialist" method, but which has a tendency to subordinate the political to the personal. Freud gives a useful model for the understanding of history and myth, but he is easily diverted to ahistorical or purely individualistic concerns, and for that reason Marxists have always had an ambivalent attitude towards him.

Wyndham Lewis is a good subject upon which to focus these problems. He is an obsessive, pathological type whose work invites Freudian analysis, but as Jameson points out he is also an overtly *political* writer, rather like a

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Bernard Shaw grown up in a "Dostoyevskian social world." A determined opponent of bourgeois democracy, he might have become a fascistic mirror-image of Shaw, except that he shares the modernist need to reinvent language and narrative form. Within modernism, however, he takes up a contentious position, placing himself in opposition not merely to nineteenth-century ideas of progress and realistic representation, but to the twenties fascination with *la durée* and private, impressionistic styles. According to Jameson (and Kenner before him), Lewis has an "expressionistic" style similar to the early Brecht, and can therefore be exempted from the charges of escapism and abstraction Lukács once levelled against the modern novel. As for Lewis's racism and sexism, these are part of what Jameson describes as the "grinding contradictions" in his work; they have at least the virtue of being presented openly, "as unbound impulses released from the rationalizing censorship of a respectable consciousness intent on keeping up appearances." In plain talk, the man was no wishy-washy liberal.

Jameson's book sems to me to accomplish a good deal of its purpose, which is a workable synthesis of ideological interpretation, narrative analysis, and psychoanalysis. He borrows freely and eclectically from the whole range of French post-structualist theory, and despite his tortured language he often makes brilliant points about Lewis. Ironically, however, he is most persuasive when he approaches Lewis's ideology quite directly and traditionally, showing the contradictions and buried wounds of social class behind writings like *Hitler* and *Time and Western Man*. As stylistics and psychoanalisis the book has a good deal to offer, but it is somewhat weakened by a tendency to overstate Lewis's difference from the other moderns, and by a slight evasion of the tensions between Marxist and Freudian theory.

Jameson is concerned to show that Lewis's novels are "decentered" and destructive of what recent French writers call the "humanistic paradigm." Lewis's prose breaks down the "illusion of an autonomous, centered 'self' or personal identity," and according to Jameson it should be contrasted with writers like Joyce and Woolf, whose internal monologues are part of a "subjectivising and impressionistic" tendency within modernism. Of course Lewis was also a vigorous proponent of the strong individual, and in a passage Jameson does not quote he once claimed that "the Absolute would be the individual of individuals, the self that has never broken down... reality is to be sought in the self or the person." Jameson argues that such notions are in vivid contradiction with Lewis's fiction, and he reads that fiction as if it were a prefiguration of Lacan's revolution. In Lewis's work, Jameson says, notions of the "self" or of "character" are shown to be merely an "effect of structure." Meanwhile Jameson assigns the other moderns to the place Lukács put them years ago: the realm of bourgeois individualism, where the cult of private personality is followed to its logical extreme.

Repeatedly Jameson holds up Joyce and Woolf as Lewis's opposites—artists preoccupied with depth psychology, the *mot juste*, and realistic characterization. In fact, however, the internal monologue, like art for art's sake, was always more adverised than practiced, and by the late twenties it had begun to disintegrate in the very pages of its best authors. Virginia Woolf attacked the early chapters

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of *Ulysses* precisely because they were centered in a "damned egotistical *self*," and *The Waves* is surely one of the most sustained demonstrations in literature of the illusory nature of individual identity. As for Joyce, he began to dispense with interior monologue and realist characterization midway through *Ulysses*. (Jameson seems to me quite wrong when he claims that the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses* "serves to reconfirm the unity of the psyche.") *Finnegans Wake*, which is not centered in any consciousness, and which replaces traditional characters with Beckett-like "psuedo-couples" such as Shem and Shaun, has recently emerged as the ultimate post-structural text. See, for example, Stephen Heath's articles in *Tel Quel*, or Colon McCabe's, new book, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*—both of which champion Joyce for having virtually the same qualities Jameson has assigned to Lewis.

On the level of psychoanalysis, Jameson proposes a method that will circumvent the vexed relation between Freud and Marx. Lewis's perverse ideas, he says, should not be analyzed as if they were "familial or archaic," nor as if they were located in the "inaccessable" regions of the "private, biographical individual"; instead they should be placed in the "objective configurations of the political history of pre-1914 Europe." He never tells us why the history of the private individual should be any more "inaccessable" than the presumably "objective" history of the continent, but he does offer vivid illustrations of how Lewis's art, like psychoanalysis itself, was affected by political and economic changes.

One of the most impressive instances of Jameson's skill at merging psychoanalysis and ideological interpretation is his penultimate chapter, "How to Die Twice," which demonstrates a contradiction between Lewis's belief in the "gifted individual" and the satire he constructed to defend that belief. Beginning in 1928, in the series of books entitled *The Human Age*, Lewis devised a genre described by Jameson as "theological science fiction," in which he violently satirized the puppet-slaves of modern society and ruthlessly killed them off, preserving their "souls" in an imaginary afterlife, where their squashed and maimed bodies were displayed in special containers. Because these were such obvious puppets, Lewis was to some degree absolved of any guilt he might have suffered for imagining their deaths; the genre itself gave reassuring proof that they had somehow survived, and since they were not "personalities," they could not be subject to real death anyway. In the later volumes, however, Lewis began to imagine a sort of Auschwitz-Hell, where the resurected victims and the angelic citizens of the afterworld could die once again, and this time for good. This "second death" was a necessary feature of Lewis's imaginary system, because a more "real" death had to be constructed in order to preserve the notion of individualism. On a deeper level, however, Jameson suggests that Lewis's vision of Hell was an enactment of Freud's "death wish." Drawing on Lacan's interpretation of Sade, he describes the fantasy of second death as "an index of the way desire, exasperated by the unsatisfactory immediacy of its nominal fulfillment in the here-and-now, seeks perpetually to transcend itself, and to project the mirage and the 'beyond' of a fuller imaginary satisfaction." Nor is this fantasy peculiar to Sade and Lewis; Jameson claims it is felt in the attempt of modernism as a whole to construct what Barthes has called a "miraculous

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stasis," a still-point of genuine Experience, which will relieve the tensions of the libido in some ultimate way.

At this point Jameson pauses to observe that the psychoanalytic framework he has been using is "ahistorical." "*However that may be*," he adds, "it is clear that such dynamics are peculiarly intensified by that process of reification which differentiates our social life from that of every other social formation . . . and which is uniquely specific to capitalism." I have italicized one of his phrases because it opens his argument to some important qualification. If Freud's *Thanatos* is present in all social situations, then "reification" could be determined as much by it as by capitalism. Furthermore the cult of Experience and imaginary stasis, which Jameson and Barthes claim are historically specific to modernism, are well-known themes of the Romantic movement; indeed one of the major problems of *Fables of Aggression* is that it makes the obsessions of Wyndham Lewis sound a great deal like the obsessions which recur in English literature from Wordsworth to Virginia Woolf.

In raising these objections I do not mean to discount Jameson's argument as a whole. His book is the best piece of criticism we have on Lewis, and will certainly revive interest in his work. More than that, it is a valuable, sustained demonstration of post-structuralist method, addressed to real political issues. Compared to it, Timothy Materer's *Vortex* seems to occupy a sheltered world. A conventional scholarly study, Materer's book describes, largely through quotation, the evolving ideas of Lewis, Pound, and Eliot, who were never exactly a "school," but who remained a friendly axis from the 1912-1914 period of the London vortex until Lewis's death in the fifties. In seven chapters, punctuated with illustrations from the paintings and sculpture of Lewis and Gaudier, Materer surveys the failed attempts of this group to make an artistic revolution. The major flaw in his book is that he never gives an adequate explanation of why the revolution was significant.

Pound, Eliot, and Lewis were linked by their American origins and by their essentially reactionary protest against democracy; nevertheless, in print they often made what Pound called "eye-gouging" attacks on one another. Egoists all, they never found a journal or a project that would unify them, and their culture criticism lacked what Materer describes as a "positive" program. Materer discusses the ideas of the group largely in terms of their debates over various dualisms: art versus nature, the mechanical versus the organic, the mind versus "reality," artistic detachment versus commitment, and so forth. Along the way, he takes excursions into the ideas of Gaudier-Brezska and Joyce, who were only loosely connected to the central trio, but whose art seems more impressive and less doctrinaire.

Materer's approach is a perfect example of the kind of criticism Jameson is reacting against. He performs a useful service in collecting the ideas of Pound, Eliot, and Lewis, but he treats these ideas as if they existed in a realm of pure thought, and he seems to accept the romantic ethos behind them. Frequently he mentions the wars and political events that influenced the moderns, but he never stresses the connections between their politics and their art. He leaves their ideology largely unexplored, and speaks in the same idealized language they once used. The complex, overdetermined relation between art

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and society never troubles him: instead he moves complacently through quotations about "poetry," "culture," and "nature" as if we were all agreed on what these terms mean. Ultimately he praises Pound, Eliot, and Lewis for their "brave but often embittered campaigns in the field of philosophy and politics," and for "the still center of their achievements as artists." Their only deficiency, according to this view, was that their tone was wrong, and their politics occasionally misguided. Their work is therefore reduced to a set of liberal pieties, and their "achievement" goes unexamined.

JAMES NAREMORE

Indiana University

The Rhizome and the Flower: The Perennial Philosophy—Yeats and Jung by James Olney. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980. Pp. xv + 379. $20.00.

Readers of James Olney's unusual and original book will find in it a great deal more than a comparative study of the poetry of W. B. Yeats and the psychology of C. G. Jung. Given the absence of contact between these two so like-minded contemporaries and the lack of influence of either on the other, the manifold similarities in their thought provide striking evidence of the vitality of the philosophic tradition that is the true subject of this fascinating project, "the Platonic system, shaped by Plato himself out of his four great predecessors" (9). The informing perspective of this ambitious "exercise in the history and psychology of ideas" (x) is set forth in an elaborate "prolegomena," where the author argues that "the Yeatsian and Jungian blossoms" draw their life from "both an historical rhizome and a psychical rhizome." He proposes, accordingly, to trace these flowers back to their roots "in ancient Greece and in the collective depths of the unconscious" (13). Whether the book succeeds as an analysis of the psychical rhizome will depend in the last analysis on the reader's willingness to make a Jungian leap of faith. Clearly Olney has done so, for he assumes that "the Perennial Philosophy" is "the natural and necessary creation of a corporate human consciousness" (12). Thus his reconstruction of the temporal development of ancient Greek philosophy is to be construed at the same time as a dramatization of "the nontemporal story of the human psyche in its efforts, conscious and unconscious, to analyze and synthesize all the experience that it encounters" (19).

Two-thirds of the book is devoted to a reading of Plato and the pre-Socratics, and Olney's saturation in the original Greek texts gives his account an involving and authoritative immediacy. His decision to focus his presentation of Platonism on Plato himself and his predecessors rather than on his post- and Neo-Platonic successors wisely avoids duplication of the existing Yeats scholarship on the subject by Kathleen Raine, F. A. C. Wilson, Morton Irving Seiden, and others. A more important reason for this emphasis stems from the author's conviction that by pushing his historical inquiry further back in time he is approaching the unconscious origins of human thought: thus he can speak of Pythagoras as

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an exemplar of "archaic man," "who . . . remains in the shadowy darkness at the bottom of every man's mind as he is also at the bottom and the beginning of the philosophic mind of mankind" (81-82). These chapters are arranged, to be sure, in a diachronic sequence from Pythagoras to Plato, yet Olney's assumption of the continuous presence of a psychical rhizome in the human mind is displayed in the synchronic unfolding of the argument, which moves freely back and forth across the history of Western thought. The effect of the constant juxtaposition of the views of Yeats and Jung with those of their counterparts in ancient Greece is to stress the ubiquitous presence of certain fundamental human ideas rather than their identification with the particular individuals who espoused them. In accordance with this synchronic perspective, the discussion of each thinker develops a particular topic: the chapter on Pythagoras, a theory of aesthetics; the chapter on Heraclitus, an account of process philosophy; the chapter on Parmenides, a theory of the symbolic mode; the chapter on Empedocles, a thesis on time and history; and the chapter on Plato, an investigation of myth and the concept of the whole man.

The essay on Heraclitus, "*Logos* and the Sensible Flux," is perhaps the finest of the "rhizomatic" chapters. The name of Heraclitus, of course, is synonymous with the doctrine that all things are always flowing. His uncompromising vision of both *psychē* and *kosmos* as a pluralistic reality of endlessly warring opposites is compensated, nevertheless, by a second and complementary teaching: "behind all change is a constant law, a secret order behind chaos, λόγος in πάντα ῥεῖ" (99). The tension between these doctrines of Heraclitus embodies the same balance between pluralism and monism that characterizes the thought of Yeats and Jung. Olney concedes that his synthesis of Heraclitean doctrine "goes far beyond anything Heraclitus ever said or perhaps could have said" (122). Embracing the example of Yeats, Jung, and Nietzsche, he readily acknowledges that he is teasing "a system and a universe . . . with all the assistance Heraclitus can give us, out of the shadows and tendencies of our own minds and out of the dark depths of the collective human mind" (123). This is the author's approach to his subject here and throughout the book, and with it he illuminates as never before the dark, paradoxical utterance of the cosmic fragments.

With the treatment of myth in the chapter on Plato, Olney reaches the heart of his argument: man's limitations compel him to resort to "mythic speech" in his unending quest for knowledge. It is this myth-making propensity that links the myths in the Platonic dialogues to the quantum theory of Werner Heisenberg, the poetics of Yeats to the analytical psychology of Jung. Jung is the key figure here, for his work not only exemplifies but addresses the psychological dynamics of man's creation of symbols. A later chapter, "Psychology of the Pleroma," develops Jung's conception of the psyche as a system, and given the intrinsic difficulty of both the concepts involved—the collective unconscious, the archetypes, the individuation process—and Jung's sometimes cryptic, often shifting account of them, the exposition is admirable for its clarity.

Much the same could be said of the chapter on Yeats, which persuades that the apparent eccentricities of his thought—his preoccupation with the arcane and

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the occult, with gyres and cones—are "centric" in every way. In the experience of revelation, recorded in *A Vision* and in so much of the visionary poetry, personal emotion is transformed into general truth, the mind of the poet becomes one with the mind of mankind. Yeats's poetry reenacts this lived experience of the truth of "the Perennial Philosophy," and in a series of masterful readings—of "Easter 1916," "The Circus Animals' Desertion," "Lapis Lazuli," and "Among School Children"—Olney demonstrates the pervasive presence in the poetry of a progress "from *ego* to *eidos*," from the "temporal world about us to the eternal world of the work of art" (278).

The concluding chapter formulates the fundamental question posed by the entire inquiry: whether man's building of systems is not merely a wishful projection of his need for order. The author's own answer comes in the form of a *credo*: "All varieties of system—whether philosophical, psychological, theological, cosmological, aesthetic, musical, or poetic—are all, by their structural order, hierarchical imitations of the prevailing harmony that is the creative principle behind and throughout the universe" (368). James Olney's searching analysis of the psychology of system-making parallels Frank Kermode's anatomy of man's creation of fictions in *The Sense of an Ending*, and it deserves to be similarly valued for its breadth of vision. At the last, his research emerges as a spiritual and autobiographical quest: "The individual discovers meaning in discovering a system—a myth, a likely story, a noble risk, call it what we will—that he can believe in" (369). And so it is with this book: *The Rhizome and the Flower*, consciously designed as itself an imitation in the Aristotelian sense of the very subject it addresses, is the latest bloom of that "great-rooted blossomer," "the Perennial Philosophy." The intent of this book of wisdom is evangelical, designed to bring the reader to ask, with Socrates, "What is the right way to live?"

PAUL JOHN EAKIN

Indiana University

Just Play: Beckett's Theatre by Ruby Cohn. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Pp. ix + 313. $18.50.

In her third book devoted to the writings of Samuel Beckett, Ruby Cohn has decided to "play with Beckett's plays." She wishes to write "an implicit appreciation through isolation of functional devices and theatre aspects," and not "an introduction . . . still less . . . summary, paraphrase or substitute." It is this latter, however, that furnishes the best capsule description of what she has written.

The book is divided into three sections: in the first, she summarizes the plots of Beckett's twenty published plays in six chapters; in the second, she devotes a chapter each to two unpublished plays and the evolution of *Fin de Partie*; the third section's three chapters are a personal appraisal of Beckett directing, persons with whom he has worked, and works which are performed in genres for which they were not originally written.

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The first section of the book contains little that is new or important. Cohn selects lines or scenes, for the most part chronically, analyzing them in terms of place and time, as soliloquizers and fictionalizers, and through repetition. This has been done before with varying degrees of success by Cohn in her two previous books and by many others.

If we might liken play to sport, this first section might be her compulsory figure skating exercise, in which she dutifully selects the familiar lines and passages that, since publication of *Waiting for Godot*, have been judged the most important for scholarship. Pozzo's "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more," does double and triple duty throughout these six chapters, as do Clov's "Finished" and Hamm's "You remain." These are only two of the most noticeable examples repeated and made to stand for variants of the same information.

Cohn takes *Not I* through four separate explications which differ only slightly with each telling, not nearly enough to merit (if we may borrow from the author's own vocabulary) so much time and place. Her discussion of this play in these first six chapters is a mirror of her discussion of all the other plays: she deals with structural variants and offers little discussion that is critically interpretive. By Chapter four, the conclusion is obvious that all her writing thus far in this book is simply one more version of the enormous body of criticism devoted to the reading of these plays, and it demonstrates what is already well known, that there is virtually nothing left to say about them. Cohn makes much of Hamm's "yawn" in this chapter, and like Hamm, we, too—yawn.

In her chapter on fictionalizers which follows, Cohn seems to be taking enormous care to keep from saying anything critical or judgmental about these plays. Rather than risk interpretive commentary, she prefers to skirt the issues. She is almost finished with her compulsory skating, but rather than move into the center of the arena to dazzle us with figure skating, she prefers to hug the safe and comfortable boards along the edges of the ice.

Cohn writes that "fiction may camouflage and contradict so as to reach a deeper truth," but she is not willing to heed her own words. She moves on in the last chapter of this section to verbal repetition, chosing Beckett's "wordshed" from *Cascando*, "...risking tedium," hoping that "this 'churn of stale words' yields new precipitates." Unfortunately, it does not. All this counting, even though bolstered by her creation of new categories (doublets, triplets, distanced repetitions, pounders, volleys) is still just a number game that demonstrates more the author's patience and ability to count, separate, and make arbitrary distinctions rather than aid in the integral understanding of a Beckett text. Only rarely does she impart something important, as when she speaks of Beckett dividing a 1971 Director's Notebook for *Happy Days* into segments called "Repetition Texts" and "Variation Texts," but we wait in vain for more information about this notebook because Cohn does not divulge it in its entirety but gives several teasing examples of what she meant. For the most part, this section relies on studies that have already covered this familiar ground, giving credit to (among others) Clas Zilliacus, Porter Abbott, and John and Beryl Fletcher (who are among the noticeable ommissions in her index).

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What makes this book of value is the middle section, in which Cohn discusses *Human Wishes*, Beckett's 1937 fragment based on the last years of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and *Eleuthéria*, the finished three act play that Beckett wrote shortly before *Waiting for Godot* and which has never been published. She also devotes a chapter to *Fin de Partie* and, as she states in her footnote, it must serve as an interim study until the fragment of the play sold in July, 1973 at Sotheby's becomes available for scholarly perusal.

Beckett gave the entire manuscript of *Human Wishes* to Cohn, along with two notebooks filled with information about the Great Cham's circle of friends and his household. They have rested in a safe deposit box until now, and although Cohn has printed the manuscript fragment in its entirety, she only reveals partial notebook contents. Of course they are too long to appear within this book, but one can't help but wish she had shortened the first six chapters to one longish one and devoted more space, perhaps another appendix, to the notebooks.

Again, this collection of material is important, but again, what she has to say about it lacks any kind of critical force. She is not above charging that any conversation pertaining to Johnson had by Beckett outside her hearing or any opinion voiced by him but not in her presence cannot possibily be valid, and she goes to great lengths to misread and discredit scholarship that is not to her liking. This makes more for suspicion of the reason and rationality of her findings rather than of the studies of which she disapproves. Her opinion, for example of why Beckett abandoned the Johnson play: "He could not resolve the conflict between the realistic biographical drama he had painstakingly prepared himself to write and the verbal ballet he actually found himself writing." But at this time, 1937, Beckett's published and unpublished writings demonstrate clearly that there was no "realistic biographical drama" that he had "painstakingly prepared himself to write." This did not come until well after his war-time novel, *Watt*. Cohn cannot bring herself to accept Beckett's own reason for giving it up, and she invents this explanation which she contradicts on the very next page in her chapter on *Eluthéria*, where she expresses surprise, "—almost incredible," that Beckett could have written this conventional three act play immediately preceeding *Waiting for Godot*. It makes her strained convolutions of why he abandoned *Human Wishes* even more puzzling, indeed suspect. Her "playing" with Beckett's texts once again becomes personal diversion rather than textual exegesis worthy of serious consideration.

Cohn is careful to correct errors she has made in her previous books, but it is puzzling (one hesitates to say damaging) that she attributes this reviewer's discussion of *Eluthéria* in the biography of Beckett to a manuscript at Humanities Research Center, Texas, when Footnote 42, page 690 of that book states quite clearly that the manuscript's provenance is Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

In the third and final section of this book, Cohn coins another neologism, "Theatricians," (to go with her earlier "Theatereality"), for persons who have been associated with productions of Beckett's plays. She gives capsule biographies of Roger Blin, Alan Schneider, Billie Whitelaw and a man named Rick Cluchey, saying she has chosen to limit her discussion "to those I most appreciate." Of these, her discussion of Whitelaw's performance in *Not I*

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is the most satisfying, simply because it presents new information. Her discussion of Cluchey, a former prisoner at San Quentin, now deeply involved with a group of actors committed to work in prisons and theatres called the San Quentin Workshop, is probably intended to show Beckett's deep humanity and to boost that struggling company's fortunes. It is an interesting vignette, but out of keeping with the rest of the book.

In "Jumping Beckett's Genres" and "Beckett Directs," we again have Cohn at play, taking information which suits her and changing what does not, shading it into a gray area that falls somewhere between kindly intended misinterpretation and deliberate misrepresentation. For example, Beckett's ongoing differences with Madeleine Renaud concerning her roles in his plays are not the genteel encounters she hints of here, and her account of his problems with Patrick McGee in recent years is a travesty of reality. She states emphatically that "There was no problem about obtaining Beckett's permission" for David Warrilow to turn *The Lost Ones* into a dramatic performance, but permission was not granted to the Mabou Mines Company until the late George Reavey and his playwright wife, Jean, interceded. This is a typical example of the kind of generalization that makes one regard the entire book with caution.

We see, in Cohn's Beckett as director, a kind, munificent, entirely admirable figure. Reading between the lines we see the rigidity, stubbornness and intractibility that makes many fine and brilliant actors refuse to have anything to do with one of his productions. This is nothing to be ashamed of, and why Cohn and others choose to keep it hidden is a mystery. Beckett is that most fortunate of artists, one who enjoys such a demand for his work that he has the luxury to insist upon its being presented in all the perfection of his own personal vision. This makes him difficult to work with, but it is nothing to distort or to hide.

Cohn continues, however, to reside in the mainstream of the kind of criticism known among many scholars of modern literature as "Becketteering." This is not a kind term, rather, it describes that group which insists upon presenting to the world a man so far removed from reality that—to quote a remark Cohn often makes—"he is a saint." He is not. He is a perfectionist in his work, and this makes him sometimes seem inflexible, determined, even quirky. He is an artist who cares about his work, a quality often found in human beings, but Cohn insists upon portraying him hagiographically.

This is true of much of her writing about Beckett. She has known him for many years and he has given her manuscripts and notebooks which would be of enormous value to scholarship. All was given to her in a spirit of open and scholarly generosity, but unfortunately, she chooses to divulge it piecemeal, thus restricting any critical commentary and evaluation of what she has written. It is this insistance on the "insider" approach that gives this book, like her previous writings, an aura of acerbity that sometimes borders on the crochety.

In general, this book does contain a certain amount of important information for any Beckett scholar, but it is ultimately dissatisfying. It is so timid. Professor Cohn plays, but the play is hesitant and cautious. She takes no chances, makes no daring moves, has no sudden darts of intellectual vivacity. One thinks of other kinds of play, of daring to steal home in baseball or even in the children's

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game of hide-and-seek, or the seemingly magical penetration by the runner of a football line, but here there is only the careful shooting by a solitary player of one lustreless marble around an otherwise empty circle.

DEIRDRE BAIR

University of Pennsylvania

Wallace Stevens: The Making of the Poem by Frank Doggett. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Pp. xiv + 160. $12.00.

In one way or another every reader of Stevens must confront his peculiar form of obscurity, a deliberate pattern of elusiveness using various registers of diction and consolidating nearly every kind of image with highly abstract concepts. In one line he might make a generalized declaration about the nature of poetry or language or some other theoretical subject one would more likely expect in discursive prose. Then in the next line he might offer another broad aphorism seeming to contradict the first one, or if not that, he might present an abruptly sensual image with no apparent bearing upon the philosophy preceding it. His early poems (1915-1931) are not as explicitly theoretical as the later ones (1932-1955), but these first lyrics still exert the same kind of expository pressure, a force inducing a reader to search out in a work some thematic model abstract and general enough to encompass all of that work's disjointed enigmas.

In the fifties and sixties, the period when the American academy first turned to Stevens in an extensive way, the typical approach to this obscurity was fairly direct. Critics like Louis Martz, Joseph Riddel, and James Beard tended to see their task as one of unearthing the thought which the verse was presumably concealing or only half revealing. But beginning with Helen Vendler's *On Extended Wings* in 1969, a different approach emerged. Stevens, Vendler stressed, was a poet before he was a philosopher. "Abstractly considered," she observes scornfully, "Stevens' 'themes' are familiar, not to say, banal, ones." Accordingly, her own inquiry would not concentrate on the poet's ideas but would instead explore his art, in particular, the way the voice of the long poems becomes its own protagonist, one heroically affirming a world that is inherently tragic. The extent of Vendler's influence remains an open question, but whatever the causes, the seventies did see, with several exceptions granted, a general shift of concern away from Stevens' thought in favor of questions of style and influence. The advantage of this more recent emphasis is that a poem is easily treated *as* a poem, i. e., a text governed by conditions of meaning that are quite different and in some ways far more complex than those governing, say, a philosophical treatise. By this same token, however, the great disadvantage of this approach lies precisely in its weak focus on Stevens' ideas. It characteristically assumes that his thought is "familiar" or hopelessly inconsistent or vaguely indeterminate or relevant mainly in what it reveals about the influence of other writers—

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some predicate, in other words, that will make the conceptual content of a Stevens poem no longer as problematic as it was, thus enabling the critic to get on with the real task of studying Stevens' art. The difficulty is that Stevens' thought constitutes a good part of his art. In fact it does not take much pondering to realize that an accurate description of the rest of his art depends upon an accurate understanding of his thought. Certainly some of the critics of the fifties and sixties did on occasion treat Stevens as if he were some systematizing philosopher and were doubtless guilty of other sins of reductiveness, but on the whole they more squarely addressed the question of Stevens' obscurity; and to my mind his obscurity is a problem that has not gone away.

Standing among the most important critics of these earlier years is Frank Doggett, who in his book, *Stevens' Poetry of Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966) and several essays of this same period addressed the relation between the poet's obscurity and his ideas as closely as anyone ever did. The *Poetry of Thought* is a carefully wrought book that both compares Stevens' ideas with a number of general themes in Western philosophy and at the same time cautions continually against the temptation to ascribe a body of doctrine to the poet. One feature of Doggett's work at this time is its immediate, unpretentious pertinence to a Stevens poem. Consider, for instance, a point he makes in an essay, "This Invented World: 'Stevens' Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'" (first printed in *ELH*, 28 [1961], 284-99): "personification ... is the staple rhetorical device of 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' .... Each personification is a kind of man and at the same time a kind of idea." You can turn to almost any part of "Notes," or for that matter many other poems, and see how central personification is to the poet's peculiar kind of self-reflexive verse. Doggett's point is of the type that may seem obvious only because the principle to which it directs us is—once it has been pointed out—so clearly manifest. Doggett continued his research on Stevens into the seventies and has now culminated this later effort with *Wallace Stevens: The Making of the Poem*. Following the trend of recent years, this study lays enormous stress on what is assumed to be the indeterminacy of Stevens' thought. The explicit theory in the poet's later style is thus described by Doggett as "tentative and undeveloped" (p. 112), and the younger Stevens of the twenties is supposed to have considered ideas as "extraneous to the real work of the poem" (p. 107). Doggett has always been cautious in discussing Stevens, but this latest book turns caution into a methodology. In spite of obvious similarities, the *Making of the Poem* represents a different direction from the earlier Doggett, and I must say I like the earlier one more.

In fairness to this book, I should also note that it has the same undecorated clarity and shows the same acuity of the earlier work. Although much of the material covered is not exactly new, its commentary still represents a genuine contribution; the impression is of someone who has read and struggled with the verse for years, someone who can bring a sense of the whole Stevens to everything he says about him. Whereas the *Poetry of Thought* looked outward toward Western philosophy for its discussion of the verse, the *Making of the Poem* confines its scope to the Stevens canon. It first correlates the poet's prose statements about poetic theory to his actual practice of poem-making, then moves to show

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how the lyrics themselves reveal as a body general semantic regularities that underlie the meanings of any single work, and finally demonstrates how certain stylistic features (like the poet's complex syntactic patterns) are intimately involved with a poem's themes. In using the prose to define Stevens' poetics Doggett concentrates more on the *Letters* (1966) than the lectures of *The Necessary Angel* (1951). This emphasis is unusual but quite appropriate, since the letters, especially the correspondence with Ronald Lane Latimer and Hi Simons, are closer to the specifics of Stevens' own views about poetry (even though the relation between the letters, the theory, and the poetry is more complex than Doggett seems to assume).

The most innovative part of the book is the chapter discussing the "possibleness" of the poetry. Doggett sets one of Stevens' favorite words, "possible," in opposition to the term "given" as a way of discussing the inductive and deductive processes involved in poetic meaning: the "given" is to refer to the indisputable information a text furnishes, "its sound and statement" (p. 43) and the "possible" to the figural connections and conceptual conclusions a reader makes as he performs a text, an activity that is virtually endless, since, according to Doggett, "the possible ... is a wordless and indeterminate meaning open to conjecture .... and, after each conjecture, the possible is still unresolved and open for another conjecture" (p. 43). The possible depends on the given, and so "not just anything that might come to mind is useful; to be credible, explication must be concerned with what is appropriate to the poet's customary usage and to the context of the poem" (p. 66). What is interesting here is the paradox that seems to emerge: poetic meaning in Stevens depends on his obscurity. Although this obscurity obviously does not promote communication in the ordinary sense of the term, it nevertheless establishes those conditions through which a text is performed again and again, each time in a different way, each time with a momentary and unique "life." Under such a program complete intelligibility is the very death of meaning. As Stevens says in a letter to Latimer, "as soon as people are perfectly sure of a poem they are just as likely as not to have no further interest in it; it loses whatever potency it had." This notion that the darkness of a text can be the source of its renewability is what makes Doggett assume that indeterminacy is built into the very structure of the poem itself. Such a conclusion seems to make sense, but I think it is invalid.

Let me suggest an alternative position by way of a brief example. In discussing the 1944 poem, "The Creations of Sound," Doggett claims that, according to the view expressed in this piece, "it is better to think that the poem is independent of ego consciousness" (p. 18), that, in other words, the actual composing of a poem derives from unconscious processes. Below is a passage from that poem with a comment by Doggett immediately following it. I have italicized the part of the clause that Doggett does not cite:

> *[T]here are words*
> Better without an author, without a poet,
>
> Or having a separate author, a different poet,
> An accretion from ourselves, intelligent
> Beyond intelligence, an artificial man

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> At a distance, a secondary expositor,
> A being of sound, whom one does not approach
> Through any exaggeration. From him, we collect.

> In "The Creations of Sound," Stevens is concerned almost entirely with the theory of the involuntary imagination. Many contradictory statements of his about the source of poetry can be considered as emanating from a bias for one or the other conception of the nature of creativity, as when he wrote Latimer that "writing poetry is a conscious activity. While poems may very well occur, they had very much better be caused...."

Most commentators read a Stevens' poem as if it were a direct reference to some aspect of the poet himself; and often, as in this remark by Doggett, there is applied a psychology of creativity equipped with the standard oppositions: rational/irrational, voluntary/involuntary, and conscious/unconscious. Indeed, Stevens does indicate in his prose a profound interest in understanding the nature of poetic creativity and often, as the quotation from the Latimer letter suggests, uses the same oppositional categories I just mentioned. This interest, moreover, involves itself in the themes of the poetry in a number of ways. But this is not at all to say that "The Creations of Sound" thematizes the imagination in the way Doggett claims it does. His remark on what he feels to be Stevens' contradictions is typical and is of a piece with other features of his study, for instance his emphasis (but with qualification) on the fact that the poet often formed his lyrics in his head so that "essentially a poem was composed before it was written" (pp. 36-37): we should not be surprised, the general message seems to be, to find the poetry something of a muddle as far as determinate thought is concerned. But what is most worthy of note about Doggett's remark is that it does not move an inch to resolve the enigmas themselves; it merely leaves us to feel that some of the phrasing could suggest the involuntary imagination. Presumably, we are to let the enigmas keep their cloud of indeterminacy.

But the obscurity of the passage derives not from actual indeterminacy but from outright deception. The sense of the poem is, as the title of one lyric has it, "The Sense of the Sleight-of-hand Man." Stevens knows very well that we shall read "The Creations of Sound" in terms of the poet himself, even when the poem baldly warns us that "there are words/Better without an author, without a poet." Doggett omits the first part of the clause, "there are words," but as it turns out, the poem is literally about its own words. Consider the following opposition:

The voice of the poem as that of its originator (i. e., the historical figure, Wallace Stevens)	vs.	The voice of the poem as that of the text (i. e., the words themselves here and now under your performance)

As you read the poem, the words create Wallace Stevens, who in this strict linguistic framework is not a human being (that would be an "exaggeration") but a conception evoked by the words, "an artificial man/At a distance, a secondary expositor," who is literally a "being of sound." In this most literal sense, the words themselves are the speakers of the poem: they tell you that it is better without an author, without a poet. They—the words right in front of

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you—are the poet for the moment, or if a different poet is to be considered (i. e., Wallace Stevens), he must be conceived as only an "accretion" from these words. The poem, which is intelligent beyond the intelligence of the poet, is thus the creator whenever it is performed by anyone, be it Wallace Stevens as he writes it or any reader at any subsequent moment of the text's history. Elsewhere in the same lyric the poet is called "X": he cannot be named because he is indefinite. Two levels of ambiguity are involved: 1) the poet X is both the text and the performer, because at the moment of performance the two become one; 2) the poet X is any performer who enacts the language by either writing or reading it. Thus the crucial ambiguities of the poem are to be found in those small relational terms, the pronouns and the prepositions, in which a multiplicity of identifications between poet, text, and audience can be played out. For example, two of a number of ways we are to read "From him, collect" are

> We (all the performers of the poem) come together here by means of him (this conception of the poet) that is part of this language.
>
> We (all the words of the poem) come together here through him (the actual author who wrote the poem).

The key to this riddle poem lies in the preposition "of" in the title, "The Creations of Sound": obviously poems are creations *in* sound, but the things of which they speak—including even the poet—are creations *by* sound.[1]

In this poem poetic ambiguity, which is not the same thing as indeterminacy, is used to portray the ambiguities inherent in language itself. Because a poem is language, we can say that in one sense the poem is the poet, that in another sense it is the text, and that in still another it is the reader (but notice how arid the idea becomes in my prose!). In a recently discovered letter to R. P. Blackmur—appearing in Holly Stevens' "Flux[2]," *The Southern Review*, 15, No. 4 (1979), pp. 733-74—Stevens writes that "ambiguity does not mean obfuscation. The clearest possible definition of things essentially ambiguous leaves ambiguity."

My discussion of "The Creations of Sound" illustrates my more general quarrel with Doggett: generally speaking, the enigmas in Stevens' verse are not inscruitible and the thought which they work to conceal is anything but undeveloped and indeterminate. Such enigmas are in fact riddles resolvable according to a consistent self-reflexive model, one based on the idea that a poem may talk literally about its own words. In many of the early poems, at least those published after 1916, and almost all the later ones, Stevens centers the theme of the creative imagination, not on the nineteenth-century ideal of a genius-originator but on the here-and-now of the language that is being performed. It is not that he shifts the focus of concern from the poet to the reader; it is rather that he thematizes the language of the text-performance itself, which he sees incorporating *both* poet *and* reader. As one aphorism from the "Adagia" has it, a poem may reveal a "poetry of words": "Poetry is a poetic conception,

[1] Much of my discussion of "The Creations of Sound" appears in my review of *The Southern Review*'s Fall, 1979 Stevens centennial issue in *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, (1980), 26-32.

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however expressed. A poem is poetry expressed in words. But in a poem there is a poetry of words. Obviously, a poem may consist of several poetries." Doggett himself seems close to this very idea when he notices how in some poems references to the act of reading suggests the creative imagination (pp. 59-62) or when he talks of the ghost in "Two Tales of Liadoff" and "The Weeping Burgher" as suggesting the absent poet who haunts the poem (p. 79). But Doggett is far from incorporating these insights into some recurrent and specifiable theory; in fact he uses the very passages referring to the act of reading to illustrate a discussion of Stevens' indeterminacy.

Within the scope of a review like this present one, I have no space to demonstrate that "The Ceations of Sound" is the rule and not the exception. Neither can I discuss the enormous questions raised by the idea of a literal "poetry of words." [2] And yet I do wish to propose, at least, that Stevens' obscurity derives from a very different source than the one Doggett suggests: where he sees the enigmas issuing from thought that, out of its own lack of formation, resists precise definition, I see the thought not only fully formed but remarkably powerful, so much so in fact that it "plays" with highly educated readers in the way a magician uses legerdemain to play with an audience of children. Why are we so easily deceived? One reason is that the poem's subject is unexpectedly and literally under our noses. Nothing is so elusive as the obvious. Of course this is not to say that there is only one idea in a Stevens poem and that a piece can only be read in a single way, but this principle of conceptual pluralism is part of the polysemantic nature of the artistic text in general and would apply equally to works of other writers whose thought is more manifestly determinate.

The deception involved in this "poetry of words" derives from the representational power of language itself, which as so many philosophers and linguists emphasize, makes itself "invisible" to our attention so that we can focus instead on the thing to which it is referring. It is a simple principle but a slippery one nevertheless. Consider this line from "Credences of Summer": "It is the visible rock, the audible...." On the screen of his mind, a reader could picture a mountain with perhaps the wind howling around it. But in context the verse is also to be read as a reference to the poem's language, which is also visible and audible. In the lines following this verse the rock is called "a sure repose," "this present ground," and "the vividest respose." In short, the one immediate and impregnable thing the voice of "Credences" can believe is the language of "Credences" itself. "The word," stays Stevens in another aphorism from the "Adagia," "must be the thing it represents; otherwise, it is a symbol. It is a question of identity." The "question of identity" is in part a question of reference, of taking "rock," say, as either a mountain or a word. But in a poem like "Credences" and "The Creations of Sound" is not

[2] I am writing a book on this entire question, *A Poetry of Words: A Study of Self-Reference in Wallace Stevens*. See my "The Semiotic Poetry of Wallace Stevens," *Semiotica*, 23, No. 1/2 (1978), 78-79, and "'Certain Phenomena of Sound': An Illustration of Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Words," *TSLL*, 20 (1978), 599-614.

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a matter of either/or. The "question of identity" may also suggest the deceptive play, in poems like these, of two modes of reference in one and the same text.

Doggett, it is clear, dislikes the notion of this kind of secrecy in the verse, the idea, in his words, of "the poem's sealed letter to the reader, to be opened by the poet or some ideal intuitive critic" (pp. 43-44). But why would Stevens' "ideal" reader be the one to uncover his deception? The possibleness of poetry, we recall, depends on the *lack* of intelligibility. "Poetry," Stevens admits in one Latimer letter "... cannot be made suddenly to drop all its rags and stand out naked, fully disclosed." It should also be noted that in the letters Stevens' consuming desire for privacy in his personal life and his religious commitment to poetry seem part of one another. He is the kind of man who can write to Hi Simons that "there is a kind of secrecy between the poet and the poem, which, once violated, affects the integrity of the poet." When he writes of other authors, he sometimes has this same relation in mind, as when he speaks in a letter to Barbara Church "of the difficulty Valéry shared with other poets of not being explicit as to his real conception, which he likes to suggest or imply, not state."

In "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" we read that one of the aims of poetry is "plainly to propound." On the other hand, Stevens' aim is also to write genuine poetry, not just versified essays about language and the performance of the poem. The letters reveal that the French Symbolist ideal of "pure" poetry exerted a profound influence upon him, especially in the early years. Hence the conflict: the more clearly defined theory becomes in the poetry, the more didactic the final result tends to be, for even theories about poetry would constitute a pollutant in verse striving in some degree to be "pure." Stevens' resolution is to bury his thinking within the strategies of the text, in "the secretions of the words," to borrow a phrase from "The Lack of Repose." As the pun on "secretions" suggests, poetry is to conceal meaning as it releases it. In another letter to Hi Simons, Stevens admits that "a man who wrote with the idea of being deliberately obscure would be an imposter. But that is not the same thing as a man who allows a difficult thing to remain difficult because, if he explained it, it would, to his way of thinking, destroy it."

Of course Stevens is not the only one who wants his enigmas to keep his poetry pure. Doggett's point about "the poem's sealed letter" is interesting because the question of actual secrecy is almost never raised in connection with the obscurity and, as I say, today discussion of even his obscurity is comparatively rare. It seems that the more enshrined Stevens became in the American academy as one of the great poets of the century, the greater the tendency to leave his obscurity in the golden mist of its apparent indeterminacy. To borrow from my earlier analogy, a large part of the child who watches the magician *requires* wonder, the same part that does not want to see through the mystery of its own astonishment. The secrecy I am imputing to Stevens is a function of not only certain features within a text, but a dynamic between a text and a certain kind of audience, one that reads and valorizes poetry within a given field of expectation. The more one reads the *Letters* the deeper the impression that Stevens wanted not so much to inform an audience as to train one. Secrecy

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after all is a form of control, and the *Letters* do reveal a man who, to say the least, liked to control things that were important to him. In one letter to Latimer, after explaining the role of the letter C in "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens requests that "if you refer to the role of the letter C in this poem, do, please, refer to it as your own explanation and not as mine, although it is mine." "Every poem," declares Stevens in another aphorism from the "Adagia," "is a poem within a poem: the poem of the idea within the poem of the words." Here is the same "question of identity" mentioned by the aphorism cited a moment ago: we may treat a word in terms of the idea it evokes (as if the word "rock" were the image of a mountain) or we may treat it as a thing in itself. According to Doggett, however, "the poem of the words" refers to the "given" of a work and "the poem of the idea" to its "possibleness" (pp. 42-43). Here he is not quite following Vendler, who begins *On Extended Wings* discussing the two "poems" as if they were markers for the old form/content opposition. And yet the effect of Doggett's whole book leads us to infer essentially the same creed as Vendler's: protect Stevens' art from his thought by first making-believe the two are separate and then showing reverence for the former and contempt for the latter. On the contrary, the most extraordinary part of Stevens' art is his thought.

Terrance King

Wayne State University

A Literature Without Qualities: American Literature Since 1945 by Warner Berthoff. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979. Pp. 204. $10.95.

Certain works of fiction, as everybody knows, manipulate not only distance but height. Flaubert, narrating his movement toward Yonville, draws closer not only horizontally but from above. And Hardy, especially Hardy, renders his world, at crucial points, as if from the Goodyear blimp. One rarely thinks of expository works as if they manipulate height in any way analogous to works of fiction. Yet that is the illusion that Warner Berthoff's book most firmly leaves—an elevated, Jovian ordering of a long, diverse period in our cultural life. The illusion of height has something to do with the tone of the scholarship: footnoting Barthes' *The Pleasures of the Text*, Berthoff remarks that it is translated "(very accurately)." It has something to do with the style, which is heavy, at times involuted, and fond of laying out the collective traits of "us." "How, most particularly, within our inter-locking system of collaborative-competitive existence (of which language itself is the most extended, but our established political custom and economic division of labor scarcely less so), do we respond to and impinge upon one another as centers or as vessels of energy and possibility?" And the Olympian angle of observation has quite a bit to do with the scale of the book: a work on the whole of American literature since the war—some thirty-five years—all done in one hundred seventy-seven pages of small format text. But the illusion of height finally has most to do with the

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quality of Berthoff's judgments. Taking the measure of thirty-five years of American literature, he judges it against certain prior, transcendent standards; and having so judged it, he decides that he doesn't like it very well.

The concept that forms the title, a literature "without qualities," comes from the title of the novel by Robert Musil. What it means, as Berthoff extends and applies it, is that American literature since the war retreats from the larger world of consequence and historical significance, retreats moreover from a continuity with its predecessors, often opting for small exercises in entertainment, virtuousity, and solipsistic self-amusement. On the question of magnitude, Berthoff measures the scope and ambition of works since the war, finding that nobody any longer seeks to write a masterpiece. Of those areas of literature that have engaged most readers and writers on the subject—the emergence of a brilliant group of Jewish novelists, the extraordinary ingenuity with which certain writers of fiction have sought to move beyond the possibilities of realism, the vigor of the drama, the altogether different voice of women in the literature of the past three decades, the consolidation of an authoritative literature by and about Blacks, the movement of poetry beyond a rather limited canon of neo-metaphysicals—none of these interest Berthoff particularly. Of the Jewish novelists, for example, Malamud is mentioned in one collective footnote, Roth is cited, in a series among others, as a maker of "expert prose entertainments," and Bellow is discussed slightly and rather airily. Of the experimentalists, Barth's fiction is cited twice, with minimal respect, Barthelme is gathered, among others, as a perpetrator of "resolute performative novelties," a gathering which also includes the only mention of Coover. Of the drama, Tennessee Williams is never mentioned. Of the women, Berthoff seems intermittently fascinated by Joyce Carol Oates; but Mary McCarthy is never mentioned, nor is Grace Paley, nor Alison Lurie, nor Joan Didion. Of the Blacks, Ellison gets passing respect, Baldwin a footnote, and Toni Morrison no mention. And of the poets, it is really only Lowell who engages his sustained attention, Roethke, for a single example, appearing in a series, among nine others, as an instance of the period's struggle "with its own will to self-destruction."

Well then, what *does* he write about? Wallace Stevens for one, Henry Miller for another. The commentary on those two writers makes up roughly a third of the book. If one recalls that both writers achieved their reputations and completed most of their major works before the end of the war, one is entitled to wonder what they are doing there, especially in the face of the dismissal of so much else. The rationale, of course, is that both are seen as precursors. In the case of Miller, the linkage is pursued tenaciously but unpersuasively. It is true that Miller seems, in retrospect, to open areas of language and subject matter and to establish a relationship to experience that can be found in much fiction since. But that he is the pivot upon which post-war fiction turns seems to me dubious. Comparable claims could be made for a substantial number of figures from Kafka to S. J. Perelman. The linkage between Stevens and poetry since is less tenaciously pursued; yet it is surely implicit or the treatment of Stevens would have no justification. The idea, in any case, that the poetry of the last thirty-five years can best be seen by reference to Stevens seems to me a preposterous assumption. And the reader for whom it is good to be

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alive and reading in these disquieting times will suspect, by the time he reaches that point, that Berthoff's sustained treatment of Stevens is a not-very-subtle means of patronizing a large number of poets since, who can be seen, in comparison to the Master of Hartford, to be triflers.

There is always room in the world for jeremiads. And no doubt our official sense of our own literature is in need of refinement, a refinement that may well necessitate a kind of virtuoso nay-saying. It is a function that Berthoff's book sometimes serves, in a sustained passage, for example, in which he pays tribute to the awesome accomplishment of *Gravity's Rainbow* while strenuously pointing out Pynchon's final inability to put us in touch with ourselves. Right or wrong, it is a passage that carries authority and conviction. But that angle of insight—the little boy in "The Emperor's New Clothes"—is not finally the one that gives the dominant tone to Berthoff's book, Rather it is the tone of a fairly ungenerous imagination for which the most characteristic gesture is not buoyant opposition but the back of the hand. The period, needless to say, deserves better.

Philip Stevick

Temple University

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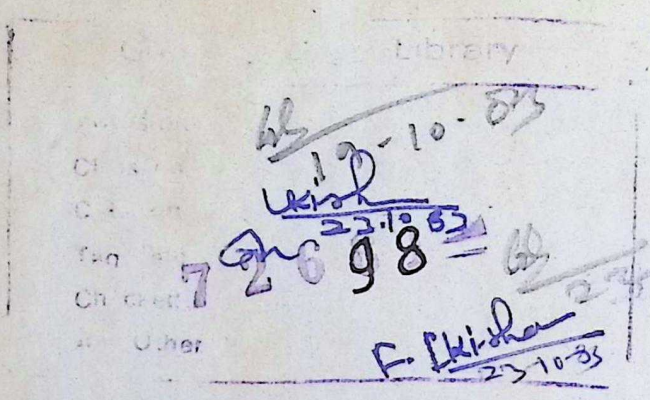

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